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AWARD OF MER

With Compliments

FROM







KING PETER



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THE LITTLE KINGDOM

FROM AN OLD MAP BY GILBERT ANTHONY



KING PETER

BY

DION CLAYTON CALTHROP

LONDON
DUCKWORTH & CO.
HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN
1906





TO

MARY VIOLET CLAYTON CALTHROP

May Day, 1906.

My dear:

When I have finished my book, written the last words, left my characters to live or die by themselves; there is but one thing for me to do, and that the best part of all. I can write upon this page:—

For you.

Your affectionate

Husband.



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FRONTISPIECE

"The Little Kingdom." From an old map by Gilbert Anthony

THE PROLOGUE

IT was a day in Spring when I sat down upon a bank,
Pleasant it was and very fine:
The small fowls sang in the trees, and the sound was merry.
The bank whereon I sat was quaintly devised in flowers,
As it were Nature had it paint freshly for May.

A TOWN I saw perched on a high hill;
The walls of it were white and the roofs were red;
A parcel of fields lay about it and some small houses;
By one side of the hill a river ran to the sea near by.
A STRANGER came to me where I did sit, and spoke to me:
"It is called the LITTLE KINGDOM," he said.
"I will you some stories tell of it and the King.
"First I will tell you of his BIRTH, and of the way his MOTHER died,
And what did his FATHER at that time.
Then I will tell you of a book of Matthew Wold, a monk,
And what he wrote in it of the SENESCHAL'S WIFE.
After that of a great thing done by the BABY KING."
"What is the name of this KING?" I said to the Stranger.
"PETER, he is called—a very puissant name.
"I shall tell you also," said he, "of THE RED COW
And of the VIOLETS.

The Prologue

Then of the COURT PAINTER—this last to show how
AMBITION came to life in him.
Then of THE SCARLET WOMAN, when MOTHERLY LOVE
Was in his life first.
After I shall speak to you of COWARDICE, a story told to
the King,
And very pregnant with meanings for all kings.
Of DEATH now shall I speak, and the firstfruits of Kingship.
Then of CANDIDA PENNY, a very quiet story.
Now I shall come to a caitiff tale of EVIL-THINKING,
And after of a GREAT BATTLE.
PETER the KING is now shown to be a true son of his stock."
"Shall these things come to one man?" I said.
He answered me, "Yes, and many more things by which
YOUTH is tried.
He shall hear of JOLLINESS and of SORROW, and shall see
That CONTENT is a great thing.
He shall try to mend a CONSCIENCE, and he shall learn to
fail in good grace.
LOVE is come to him in a queer guise to teach him to be
a man,
And he shall adventure in it prettily, as you shall hear.
Then he will try to judge by a POET'S JUDGMENT, but he
shall fail again.
Again shall he fail, whereby he may learn that kings
May not meddle with the LOVES of their PEOPLES.
At last he shall know the STORM OF LIFE and of
The BEAUTY OF SACRIFICE and of TRUE LOVE."

"Well," I said, "tell all this to me, and I will
Put it down and call it 'KING PETER.'"



KING PETER



KING PETER

THE FIRST YEAR

THE HAND THAT GIVES AND THE HAND THAT TAKES

IT was very dark in the room where the Queen lay dying, and quiet, but for the dash of rain against the windows, the sound of distant thunder, and the whisper of leaves hurled against the window near her bed.

Seven tall candles glared and flickered by the bed, making the shadows dance on the walls.

The fire in the hearth gave now and again a burst of light, now and again the logs shifted with an uneasy noise.

It was the state bedroom. The birthroom of the Kings,—furnished with all the pomp of such an apartment, the tapestries showing the great deeds of one Ongar, the founder of the line.

The Queen was in the throes of childbirth. She





lay breathing heavily on the great bed, her eyes, grown huge with pain, roved round the room, every sound seemed to leave a mark of pain on her face. Her hands, white hands, clutched and opened on the counterpane of the bed like fish out of water.

She whispered something, and the old nurse leant over her.

"Air." A figure rose out of the corner by the bed, crossed to a little window and loosed a catch. At once the flames of the candles set up a whole troop of dancing shadows on the tapestries, and the hangings themselves became alive with little shivers as the wind wandered behind them.

Two women by the fireside, who were warming sheets and preparing little clothes and hot water, looked round towards the Queen.

She lay, her long red hair in two thick plaits on either side of her head, and drew great breaths of the fresh air, her hands still convulsively working, her face still crossed and seared by shadows of pain.

Now and again she moaned and tried to cool her hot lips with her tongue—then the old nurse wiped away the perspiration from her forehead and bathed her lips with warm water.

The nurse signed for the window to be closed, and the same figure rose to obey her.

The Hand that Gives

Just before the window was shut, a cow outside moo-ed and moo-ed for her calf—it was heard quite plainly in the room. The Queen made a sign for the window to remain open, and she listened eagerly to the sound of the cow.

Above the whistling noise of the wind and the hiss of the rain could be heard the plaintive calling of this poor cow for her calf. The Queen smiled and said to her nurse "Poor thing." The window closed. The white fingers began their almost mechanical movement on the counterpane.

Below in the chapel, the King was on his knees before the altar, prayers coming from his lips, half prayed, his heart in the birthroom up above, his whole imagination bent on the scene, his body quivering with sympathetic pain, his actual senses numbed.

In the choir half-a-dozen monks were praying, the rosary of one clicking as it dropped bead by bead from his hand. The sandal of another scraping as he shifted on the floor. The abbot, a stout man, knelt on the altar steps, all wrapped in gloom. The gold and colours of the altar-piece shone in unexpected places, where the candle-light touched the panels.

The King's mind turned over the whole of his

life in the endeavour to see if one deed or thought of his could be set off in his prayers as a reason or bribe that his wife's life should be spared. Mentally he promised to every saint in the calendar, who would help him in his petition, all manner of prayers, chapels, offerings—anything.

He was a man of about fifty, of enormous build, a great brown-bearded man, very quietly dressed, a man who had but given up a wild, hunting, fighting life a year ago, and who had then brought back from one of his seafaring expeditions this tall, red girl as his Queen.

His soldiers and his sailors loved him as one of themselves, for he made war royally, yet without any undue pomp and significance to himself—living a simple life.

Stories of him were spread about for many miles—of his great strength, his untiring energy, of his stern, rough justice.

The ladies of his kingdom worshipped him at a distance—he treated them as he treated his pets, with a simple rugged kindness and aloofness.

Then he had brought home this girl, wide-eyed, tall, with red hair, whom the kingdom idolized, and before whom the King unbent and played with as a child. He saw her now as he knelt there, as

he remembered her that evening when he knew her hour was coming. She was in her rose garden; how the scent of roses seemed to fill the chapel—the garden the King had planned for her himself. Her arms were full of sweet late roses, and the evening sun lit on her hair and on her cream-white face. She had stuck a yellow rose in her hair and leaned back for his admiration, when suddenly a great fear came on her; her eyes opened wide, her hands, dropping the roses, went up to her heart, and she half fell towards him. He looked in her eyes and knew, and whispered, "God send it may be a boy."

That was in September. This wanted but an hour to the first of May.

He could bear it no longer, and stood up to go out of the chapel; then one could realize that all the extraordinary stories about his strength might well be true. How he had swung a man in armour from his horse with his left arm and dashed him to the ground. Stories of his terrific temper, when he had split great tables, thundering on them with his fists. Of his holding the Bridge of St. Andrews, one man against seventy when he was but twenty-two, and many like stories.

Now if the Queen died and the child, he must

either marry again or the Little Kingdom would go to his cousin. Of course, he should have married years ago when he was a young man, but the kingdom was nearly always in a state of war at that time—he had restored peace and abundance upon it, but no heir—for his last expedition to pay off an old score he had meant to have taken the castle of Emms, which lay east of him, about fifteen miles—instead, before that, he had met this red girl, and now she lay dying.

How was it, he thought as he left the chapel, that she must die—the only thing that ever had tamed him, his good angel? Why should God take from him the keeper of his conscience, the one being in the world who tempered his justice with mercy? He could feel in the town the change towards him since he had brought her home. Before, he had been respected and had needed nothing more than respect and obedience; now, since his wife had shown him the value of love, he needed and craved for affection. God would not, should not, he said to himself, take away all and leave nothing —what would he care if the child lived—they should both live—who would take them away? No one had ever frustrated a wish of his before; this was more than a wish, it was a command. So he persuaded himself.

The Hand that Gives

The door of the Queen's room opened and a figure stood there. The King came up the stairs, trying to tread softly, up the stairs and into the room.

As he entered the nurse was showing a man out of the room, a barber-surgeon, Bernard by name, who had helped to deliver the lady of Emms of a daughter not a great many hours before. He had given the Queen a soothing drink.

The King met his eye, and the man looked at him once, quietly, then looked away. The ladies who were by the fire left the room and the nurse also.

In the great bed lay the Queen, her hands still fingering the counterpane. She smiled at her husband bravely. He, half bewildered by the heat of the room and the strong smell of scents in the air, came up to her, his heart beating wildly. He felt as if he were on the point of a tremendous struggle with some powerful hidden enemy; his muscles hardened and his face grew stern; he stooped, and as it were measured his imaginary opponent, whose name, had he known it, was Death. The Queen knew and stretched out a hand to him which he took in both his own, holding it as if it were a rose leaf that might blow away, and then he knelt down by the side of the bed to bring his head near to hers. She was too exhausted to speak, but she smiled at him, her

hand nervously tightening and loosening on his. He was for the second time in his life afraid ; the first was when he had first kissed her ; now it was because he did not know what to do, what to say. Suddenly the play of her hands ceased, and she fainted with a little cry.

At that the nurse and the ladies again came into the room, and the nurse ordered the King outside —he felt like a child and left at once, asking only to be told if anything happened, adding that he would be found in the cloisters. Rapidly he made his way to the cool air, and came out into the cloisters at that part where they overlooked the garden ; it was by an archway that gave on to a trim lawn.

The storm was nearly over, but the lightning played on the distant hills and the murmur of the departing thunder was still to be heard ; the drip, drip of the trees in the orchard, the deeper note of the rain gushing from the spouts on to the flags of the walk, the faint peculiar sounds of the time that precedes dawn, came to the King's troubled senses with a wonderful refreshment.

How long in a sort of dumb-minded agony he walked there he did not know, only he knew that never before had his wife seemed so dear to him, never before had the secret strings of his heart

been touched, never before had he, the King, been kept waiting, waiting.

In front of him little torrents and streams raged, muddy water washing along sodden leaves and may blossom, these little rivers he watched as if his life depended on it. A hundred trifles occupied his eyes; his mind aching with suspense dwelt on one thing only—his wife.

He was not what would be called a friendless man, but his friends were not people of the Court, not knights of near-by castles, or lords of the Little Kingdom, but a few rough fishermen and hunters, with whom he cast off his kingliness and fished or hunted as themselves.

He wanted something or someone to be near him, but he knew that his Chamberlain would be dry and only politically sympathetic, and that the fishermen would get upon his nerves. It was a shock to him to find that he had nerves which could be jarred. His ordinary world was upset, he longed for action where he could shine, instead of this horrible waiting—waiting—waiting.

A snail crawled along by his feet and he put out his foot to crush it, feeling that this would be something to do; then he smiled strangely to himself, picked up the snail, and put it out on to

the pathway—to him it was a concession to his weakness to begin to take care of anything.

The raindrops spotted his hands, and he became aware that he was feverishly hot.

The bell rang in the monastery below for an office, and he felt glad that prayers would be rising for his wife. Never before had he realized the use of monks—mentally he put aside a rich gift for the monastery.

A footstep behind him, a light step. He turned round and saw one of the Queen's ladies approaching. He stood up finely to receive the news.

By her pinched, tired face he saw what others had passed through, and wondered if he too looked what he felt. He stopped her with a gesture.

"Your Majesty," she began, but he waved the preliminaries aside.

"A boy?"

"Yes, sire," she replied, and fell forward from faintness.

Not accustomed to faintness, the King was at a loss, so he lifted the lady, whom he carried as easily as if she were nothing, and placed her under a waterspout; then he ran as hard as he could along the cloisters to the hall, to the staircase, up to the birthroom. Fear behind his steps.

He paused a second on the threshold of the door. It was a momentous occasion—an heir to the House of Ongar. He paused, summoned up his courage and entered the room.

The first thing he saw was the hands of his wife plucking at the counterpane, a hard staring look in her eyes. By the bed the abbot, his hand lifted in benediction, round the bed kneeling monks. If a thought of heaven crossed his mind ever before, if the faith of his fathers was anything to him really—now at this moment he summed it up, "My God—don't."

Roughly he brushed by the kneeling figures to the bedside.

"Arnice," he cried, his life, as it seemed, flowing out of his lips.

Those tireless fingers went on working at the counterpane, those hard eyes staring out into the unknown. Then she seemed to feel his presence and she smiled and looked towards the firelight. There a white bundle was being held by the old nurse. Everything to the King was in a haze but his wife. He glanced towards that bundle, which was the hope of the kingdom, and turned again to his wife. Those working fingers, sign of her awful suffering, pulled at the stuff, and worked towards his hands, outstretched upon the bed.

The only sounds were the muttering of prayers by the monks and the soft movements of the nurse.

Suddenly his wife shook in bed, and she looked to the window. The abbot, who was nearest to it, opened the casement, and the early morning air stole in—it was four o'clock.

The Queen seemed to listen for something ; one hand gripping and working on the King's, the other now tearing holes in the counterpane.

A cow began moo-ing and moo-ing for her calf. The Queen became suddenly quiet, laid one hand on the King's head—the moo-ing went on.

"Poor thing," she said, fell limp in bed, and died.

The hand on the King's head fluttered limply, then stopped.

He knew it was no use, his heart seemed to stop, his senses numbed, his devouring eyes were on his wife's face—a face so still and peaceful in death, so white against those two long plaits of hair.

The picture of the moment was blurred and then, sharp and definite, it fixed itself on his brain. The open window made the great candles flicker.

The dim, uncertain light outside stole into the room, and a chill air came with it. The hangings of the bed rustled softly. The soft whispers of the monks, the nurse moving quietly with the baby, the

women crying,—all these sounds pierced him. On the bed all his hope, all his love, all his tender thoughts lay. Suddenly he realized that she was dead—in the crowded emotions of his pain this had not yet fixed itself so sharply. He got up from his knees and felt them shake under him. He walked away from the bed, and made to go out of the room, when the nurse, her eyes red and puffy with weeping and the long vigil, held out the baby to him. He looked at it once—so peacefully sleeping —and felt no joy, no pride, nothing but a bursting longing to have his wife back, leaning on his shoulder. The line went on at this expense; he felt the child a political acquisition, and there welled up into his heart a hatred of this red morsel of life that had robbed him of his heart's desire.

A Lady of the Chamber opened the door and he went out. In the passage were the Chamberlain and the officers of the household, waiting, with the Lord of Borewood and the Master of Langton Sea, ridden over early to hear the news, but he strode through them, his cloak about his face, looking neither to right nor left, passed along a little passage, up a little stairway to a door. Over the door was a painting on the wall of our Lady and Saint Elizabeth, both big with child. It had

been put there by his father to commemorate his own birth, when the late King waited in the High Tower for the news. As a rule he crossed himself when he passed by the picture, now he looked at it in a dull vacant way, and then laughed bitterly, and loud. The Lord of Borewood, who was a man of seventy, heard the laugh right down in the passage, and his heart chilled at the sound of it, but none dare come near the King in the hour of his grief.

Up the winding way to the top of the High Tower the King went, and out into a little watch balcony built out from the top, roofed over, the roof supported on two great beams set into the wall of the balcony.

Here he sat looking out on to the town which lay spread before him like a map. Straight in front of him, three miles outside the walls, was the Forest of Borewood; to the right of that, the dip of the hill towards the sea; on his left, the river Candida, winding along by the plain of Emms to the marsh ground called Bittern Bottoms. He looked down below and saw the market-place and the castle gardens and the roof of the monastery, and the many red roofs of the town, still bathed in a faint morning mist—it was all his and hers, and the boy's, a part of life to him.

The Hand that Gives

The western gates of the town were opened and some sheep were being driven into the town, looking from the height like quicksilver rolling over the down; he could hear the dogs bark at the laggard sheep. The swifts flew high, near to him, it was going to be a fine day—May day.

He sat dumbly, thinking of all this, seeing with unheeding eyes the many changes of light in the sky as the day broke and dispersed the mists in the valley.

Now knots of people gathered in the market-place, talking; they knew now, down there. Some one called out and the men began taking the May-pole down—hammering—how clearly it sounded in the morning air. Then a man hurried through the great gate of the castle into the market-place and spoke—he knew what he was saying, it was his herald—

"An heir has been born to the House of Ongar. Our most gracious Majesty, the Queen, died this morning, may her soul rest in peace. Long live the King and God bless the Prince."

Then bells began to ring in the monastery and the friary over by the Jews' quarter. Then a sanctus bell.

The King lifted his face to heaven and raised his hand.

"God," he cried, "if you be a God indeed, curse you, curse you—I'll have no more of this mumming, this pretty praying. Oh, my God of justice and mercy, a fine God indeed to trick a poor mortal of his heart and leave him blank despair! You whom the devil-dodgers say created everything, sit on your cursed justice-seat and rob me without reason of the purest thing you ever created. I renounce you—vow myself to the devil and his worst hell, for I can feel no hell bad after this hour. I will play God too, and rob men of their wives and bring sorrow and misery on my little kingdom, as you on yours."

There was a whining sound at the door, and his favourite dog, a greyhound bitch, pushed her way in and nosed at the King's hand. He turned and looked at the dog, and remembered how his wife had played with the pups only six months ago, and a violent awful anger came into his heart, and he took hold on the dog and twisted her neck violently till she died. Then he took her body and flung it over the side of the balcony, where it would fall into the moat.

Then a great lump rose in his throat, and the tears rained down his cheeks.

THE SECOND YEAR

THE SENESCHAL'S WIFE

FROM A BOOK KEPT BY ONE MATTHEW WOLD, THE MONK

IT has fallen to me, who erstwhile rejoiced in the vanities of the flesh, to sit in cloisters and in the shadow of our little church, where lie the bones of St. Wite of blessed memory.

I was of the town when our good founder was Seneschal, and to him was his lady, Clare, a sweet pretty morsel, with an eye like some flower, whose name I do not know.

How it came that the Seneschal married the Lady Clare, he being a sober-minded man and given to much praying, passes my comprehension.

Myself was a braggart of a boy with an eye to a comely face (Lord save me from over-tender memories) and was body-man to my lord and humble servant to my lady.

Over against our dwelling, outside the walls, was the great tower the King had built to imprison the sorcerer, in the first years of his reign; three

hundred and fifty steps it had and but two rooms, one atop for the sorcerer now dead, or flown, some say, and one below to guard the entrance.

Often have I seen Lady Clare, walking in the garden with her dogs, look up at the grim place and shudder when she crossed its shadow, and she would gather up her skirts and call her dogs, each by some absurd name, as Bob, Chitterbob, and the like, and run across the grass with them to a seat she had under a great tree. There she would sit by the hour with her little loom or her embroidery frame, or reading of a cramped written book out of the Seneschal's book cupboard, and every time a man crossed the path from the house to the outer door, she would spy at him from her point of vantage through a round, ivy-covered archway. Many a man, hot from a long ride, urging to an audience with the Seneschal, would be refreshed by the sight of this pretty lady, her head a one side, peering from her cool place under the tree to the hot walk across the courtyard.

Now it was a month or so after the Queen died in childbirth, and the King's doings were already a scandal to all God-fearing folk, that the real beginning is to my story.

The King, maddened, some said, by his wife's

death, was returning in a measure to the tune of his youthful days. Hardly was the Queen laid to rest (indeed Adam the carver was still at work on the tomb) when great lords and foreign princes of the wildest reputation came to the castle, and God save me against the talk I heard when the great company were in their cups.

The King slept all through mass, he ignored the abbot, and spoke openly of "gossip priests" and "old women monks"; he drank, hunted, cursed, and swore, and caused the idle half of the town to love and adore him, and the more sober population to lift hands and look to heaven for a punishment.

He pinched the cheek of a girl from Langton, he drank in the "Peter's Finger" with three fishermen, the landlord round-eyed and frightened, the landlady and her daughter a-flop on their knees upstairs, praying to be saved from his rolling eye.

He took to wearing a short houppelande, and clothed his ungodly but sightly legs in brilliant colours, and rode a great black horse to the common danger of the streets.

In the middle of all this the King remained active for his people, and sat regularly to give audience to any man who had complaint or request.

Now it so happened that there came some grave

and important news, which the King and the Seneschal, my wise master, had great conference about, and in order that he might get private advice, the King took to coming early in the morning to walk with the Seneschal in the garden.

One day, when the plums were ripe, the King pulled one or two, wet as they were with the dew on them and cool in the morning, after such nights as he had, and having eaten one and dropped the stone, he bit the other and cursed, for it was ant-eaten inside and rotten.

He flung the plum over a yew hedge, and heard a cry from behind it.

The Seneschal knit his eyebrows in anger to think there had been a listener, but the King ran round behind the hedge and presently emerged with Lady Clare, whom he lifted over a flower bed as easily as if she were no weight, and dropped her breathless on the grass.

She looked (as I saw from my chamber window) like a frightened bird.

"What bird is this in your shrubbery, Master Sobersides?" said the King, laughing.

"My wife, sire," said the half-frowning Seneschal.

There was a juicy stain on her face where the rotten plum had hit her.

"Your humble servant," said the King, and with that he took out a kerchief from his breast and wiped away the stain as if she had been a helpless child—a way he had with women.

The Seneschal looked confused, his mind still running on affairs of state.

The Seneschal's wife looked under her eyes in amazement at the King—and the King hitched up his hose at the right knee, bowed, took the Seneschal's arm, and walked him away.

Never was a lady's dignity so shattered—to be hit on the cheek with a rotten fruit, to be caught eavesdropping, to be lifted up, set down, bowed to, laughed at, to have a cheek wiped like a baby, and then, bless my soul, to be absolutely ignored, left behind, thought of no consequence.

That afternoon she pinched my arm for nothing, and gave me a crown in the evening for less.

The next morning, however, saw the Lady Clare up betimes and in the garden feeding her pigeons; in a fine gown, with her hair simply but effectively dressed—and strange to say, the same time saw the King also, early for his appointment, come to eat plums.

They exchanged salutations. She gave him, at his request, a plum, which he ate. He smiled at

her, and then, as if in thought, looked at the plum and wiped his cheek. The blood rose to her cheeks at once, and she was about to say something when the Seneschal came out to them.

So there were many meetings in the garden.

It is the custom, as most know, for the ladies of our kingdom to give alms to the poor on the feast of their patron saint—a good and holy custom, though often attended with some brawling and knavery.

On the Feast of St. Clare the Lady Clare was about early and to mass and to certain holy exercises and much meditation.

On the mead, by the Peter Gate, was set a great Blue Pavilion, and in the pavilion trestle tables and a hard wood seat. Outside was a sort of little alley made of hurdles, to keep the folk back and in some kind of formation. The Lady Clare came down to the pavilion, walking through the streets, in a white gown, with a white wimple over her head, and without maids, but only some few men of her livery and the Seneschal riding in front—a most humble and proper business.

It was afternoon, the morning having been spent among the sick. It was late enough for the field work to be over, and the harvestmen already there.

The brown-faced crowd were kept back by soldiers, —the plover-netters and the basket-makers from the fens, and the pink-cheeked girls from the near farms, the blue-eyed fishermen and the town-eyed cap-makers and wool-workers—everybody from patched Franciscans to comfortable Benedictines—everybody from stable-boys to esquires and pages, was there.

The situation was in a way a town joke—they called the Seneschal and his lady the owl and the partridge.

In the door of the pavilion, the flaps of which were tied back, might be seen the tables covered with little loaves, and a small coin to each, stamped with a fish. Behind these the abbot in full canonicals.

Then "Bless me, Father" and a public Confiteor; then the Absolution and the blessing of the loaves and the fish pennies (done in memory of the blessed miracle of the loaves and fishes).

Then the Lady Clare, looking as demure and pretty a saint as anybody could wish, sat down by the tables on the hard wood seat, and commenced to give away the loaves and fish pennies.

The Seneschal stood by for a while watching the scene, and then, full of the King's business, rode

away. He was a great man for the King—no matter if he drank and cursed and pinched pretty cheeks, he was the Lord's anointed—and the Seneschal in serving him felt he was serving the Lord, so he shut his eyes to the faults and opened them to the business to his hand—a good man, with his nose for heaven.

Still the people came on for their alms, and still, demure and pretty, Lady Clare sat at her tables.

Now, above the noise of the people, came the sound of great laughter and jangling of horse-trappings, and anon, over the brow of the hill, came the King, some knights, and some huntsmen, from their hawking.

They rode across the meadow, meaning to enter the town by Peter Gate.

When the King saw the crowd of people and the Blue Pavilion, he was for turning back, because already the folk near him were bending the knee and crying "The King!" "The King!" and he saw that the noise and clamour would swell and would distress the lady whose day it was.

So he made as if to stop, rode a little nearer, saw Lady Clare, sent on his people ahead, threw his cloak to a page, got off his horse and strode to the pavilion.

The people made way. He stopped their calling as he neared the pavilion by raising his hand, and came nearer.

"I kneel as a beggar," he said, kneeling—but he laughed into her face.

She gave him a loaf and a penny, and smiled at him.

"I rise a rich man," he said, catching the smile and holding her with his eyes.

The people strained to see and to catch the words, as if it were a play.

"'Tis the fowler after the partridge," some voice said in the crowd.

Lady Clare turned scarlet.

The King was standing, but could not see from whence the voice came.

"This is no way to deal charity," he said in a loud voice—then he swept a great pile of loaves into his arms, and tossed them into the crowd, then he scattered the pennies, and so on until the tables were cleared.

It was almost, if not quite, a sacrilege, but it was well done in such a bold manner that it passed for a huge pleasantry, seeing the day was over and the pious souls had gone their ways.

Under cover of the confusion the King said in a

low voice to the Lady Clare, "Well, little saint, so they call you the partridge."

"True, sire," she replied shyly, "though I heard it for the first time."

"And your good man the raven, I make no doubt?"—in which he was wrong, but it passed.

"And you, sire, the fowler!" she said, half serious.

He waved that aside.

"There are plums in my garden also," he said.

She turned from him.

"Yellow plums," he said, as if it would interest her. "I am an early riser," he continued, "and a lonely man."

She said nothing.

"Should one leave one's little door open," he said, "with careless guards, and hungry boys?"

"I leave no open doors," she replied, and made as if to go, not knowing what to do till her maids came with the litter.

"One cannot resist eating when fruit is ripe," said the King.

"I beg you to leave me, sire," she said in a frightened voice.

"Your husband leaves on a journey to-morrow," he said, looking at her, "you will be lonely. I will send a boy who sings well to cheer you."

He bowed and left her, passing through the people who were still searching the grass for pennies, like hens after grain.

He went into the garden where his page waited with the black horse, and Lady Clare's litter passed him on its way out to the Blue Pavilion.

It may be a wonder as to where I got all my information, but luckily for history, most servants gossip, and servants overhear a deal of talk never meant for them.

The Seneschal went away early in the morning.

The Lady Clare watched him ride away with his men about him.

From the market-place he could see her at her window, high up, a little white figure waving something to him.

He waved back to her, turned and rode away.

The owl is a wise bird, but blind in the plainest daylight.

In the stillness of the early morning, you could hear the horses clatter over the stones. Lady Clare followed them with her eyes, saw them as they showed at turnings, lost them as the tall houses swallowed them up, watched them appear again outside the town on the road to Borewood, lost them in the mists that hung about the lower ground, and

then turned to her room and to her bed, leaving the window open.

She found her warm form in the cold sheets and nestled into it, awake with the fresh morning air, comfortable in lazy day dreams in the bed.

Then, later, she rose, dressed and went to the household work, her keys jingling as she walked, played the sedate matron, hummed an air and dipped her finger in the cream in the dairy and sucked it dry—hummed another air and thought to go out and pick a rose.

So she ordered a bowl of milk, some cakes and fruit under her tree, unchained her dogs, and laughed as she failed to blow a whistle out of her rounded lips.

When she arrived at length to her breakfast she found under the tree, standing, a most brave boy, with a stringed instrument in his hand.

He bowed low, and then bent knee and kissed her hand.

Knotted into his long hair were two ribbons of the King's colours.

Then as she sat, he played and sang to her.

Now in spite of her marriage to my lord the Seneschal, she knew little of court life—there being little to know—the late Queen had been a

homely and quiet lady, and the few ceremonies and festivals at the court, quiet and restrained ; so that the few love songs that Lady Clare knew were mild and sentimental. Here was something different—something in the songs, something in the music to make her heart beat.

As she rose to go indoors, another boy in the same rich attire, wearing the King's colours, arrived by way of the archway, and presented her, on bended knee, a dish of yellow plums.

Lady Clare was flustered, perturbed, shy. She took the plums with a pretty bow of thanks and signed to the boys to go, but they stood there together, and sang in duet a new song, the burden of which was—

"My heart is like an open door."

After this, with many reverences, they departed.

All that day Lady Clare was pondering over this romantic business.

The King, she thought, is sad for his wife ; the King, she thought again, was giving her a childish treat. This made her angry. The King, she thought, has a very brave manner, and—well, what would it matter if she did peep through the garden door. If he could carry on his romance prettily, it was not for the Seneschal's wife to lag behind.

Meanwhile she ate yellow plums.

The next morning, with her heart beating hard, she crept stealthily out of her own garden, along between two high walls, and so to the garden gate which gave on to the King's orchard.

It was a little black door, sunk in the thick wall, and it opened easily with a latch—this she pressed and went inside.

The morning sun flickered through the leaves of the fruit trees, and made patterns of bright changing spots on the dew-soaked grass.

A path led among the trees, and this she followed. She had let thoughts fly and leant on the excitement of the adventure.

At the end of the path she found a wooden seat, and hanging over it a plum tree, laden with yellow early ripe plums. Some of these she plucked.

It seemed a dull adventure. No one was near, she was being treated like a child.

Suddenly a voice behind her—"If you steal, I steal also, Clare."

A rough beard against her face and her cheek kissed. She sprang up.

"How dare you, sire?" she cried, and shrank away.

The jest was ended. Something burned in the

King's eyes. He had meant it for a flirtation, a light play. Now it was different, he felt an immense desire for the woman.

There was silence between them. Then she spoke. "I must go home," she said, but she did not move.

He also remained standing as he was, smiling at her.

"Nothing prevents you, brown bird," he said, and stepped to her.

"Remember my husband, your people. Oh, sire, let me go."

"No one shall stay you, Clare," he answered, his hand on her wrist.

The thoughts flew between them fast. Neither spoke what was in their minds, neither let go the torrent of words one true word would let loose.

The King, for all his tanned skin, grew white; she was very pale.

"The other doors to this part of the garden are closed," he said, his eyes searching her face.

She shivered.

The silence of the morning seemed to grow round them. The birds hopping on the branches now and again disturbed the trees, or a little puff of wind shook the leaves.

Then from outside came a noise of animals, hurrying along the narrow lane.

Something pushed against the door, which both could see from where they stood.

A man whistled, a dog barked, then some sheep pushed open the door and entered the orchard, munching at the first grass they found. It was the shepherd, turning sheep in to keep the grass down.

The incident saved her. The shepherd, a lazy old fellow, urged the animals in, called off his dog, and shut the door.

"My lord," she said hastily, the words tripping over one another on her tongue, "My lord, I am a girl, not versed in great moments. You do wrong, I love my husband. You have your kingdom, your people, your child. This is some work of the devil to which we are both innocent and as yet are clean from it. Let me go my ways."

But he was awful with the waiting.

"My God," he said, "here under these trees I call you as man to woman, before which thing husbands are nothing, people nothing, kingdoms lie in a kiss."

"And if I will not?"

He saw in her that she would not and froze his hot blood and became cruel of wasted desire.

His hand had left hers long ago. He took her by the wrist and said "Come."

She, listless and limp after her soul battle, followed him and they passed by another path to a door giving on to the garden.

Here he called two men who watched there, two of his new rough soldiers, and bade them take her.

"Take away the damned witch," he cried, "to that tower where I put all such vermin."

And to her, as she looked astonished, frightened at him, he said—

"So I will treat all who scorn King's love, and King's desire, and unless you come down those steps upon your knees and pray for mercy, you stay in that tower till the devil flies away with you."

"I am innocent," she cried, standing between the two men. "My husband will hear of this, these things cannot be done; you have no will of me to place me in durance as you please; the town will rise against you."

"Treason also," said he—"you hear her," to the men.

"My husband will see to this," she said, tears running down her face.

"And I shall tell him of it," said the King; "how his wife came early to my garden—to what

purpose—how she beseeched me, complained of her cold husband; how I pitied her, and then in contempt of myself and her, threw her into a tower, sooner than see her do penance in a shift before the church doors.——Take her away."

The child nature of her fell away liked a used-up garment and she put on the cloak of womanhood. "This tower shall remain a curse to you until such day as you pass into your city in the poorest rags, in tattered company, and I shall then forgive you your wrong, at your most earnest prayer."

"Take away the witch," he cried.

And the men, walking on either side of her, led her through the garden, out of a gateway, through staring prentices, women and children, workmen and others—out of the city to that tower which cast its shadow daily across part of her own quiet garden.

But it will be shown that the Seneschal guessed the truth.

THE THIRD YEAR

THE SENESCHAL'S WIFE

FROM A BOOK KEPT BY MATTHEW WOLD, THE MONK, AND OTHER SOURCES

IT was I who rode with the news to the Seneschal. I met him at the edge of Borewood Forest, early on a September morning, a week after Lady Clare had been imprisoned in the Sorcerer's Tower.

I can see him now as he sat his horse rather heavily, the trees, his background, already turning in odd places to gold and brown; the heather carpeting the ground, the sky grey with blue patches, the air chill, but with a promise of later warmth.

He saw that I had news of grave importance, and he bade his men go a little way from us and light a fire to cook breakfast for us; then he turned to me. It was difficult to tell the tale to a man sitting like a statue on horseback so far above one, so stonily listening. Once he said, "God's will be done." He asked no questions; he hardly seemed to hear me, but he looked right

away towards the town which at present was shrouded in mist.

His hands, which were together on the pommel of his saddle, never moved; he appeared frozen; his head was tilted a little up; his eyes were expressionless.

Then the mist rolled away, and one could see the town on the hill in the distance. At first it looked like a patch of grey earth on the green; then it slowly grew plain to the sight. One could see the houses in a mass huddled up to the greater mass of the abbey and the castle; on the right the Sorcerer's Tower stood up straight and isolated outside the walls.

Still the Seneschal was silent.

The clouds broke and a ray of sun quivered on the green of the hill below the town, showed the silver streak of the river and the dark silhouette of the mill. The light crept up the hill, grew in strength, and then the clouds dispersed everywhere and flooded all the scene with brilliant sunlight.

The Seneschal bade me wait where I was. His voice was quite calm. Then he rode into the forest.

I had dismounted and lay in the heather, my

horse cropping the short grass where he could find it; and as I lay I wondered what the Seneschal would do. It must have been two hours after when my name was called from among the trees. I went in the direction of the call.

In a space among the pines and fir trees I found the Seneschal, his face years older, his eyes like the glow of a burnt-out fire, his shoulders bent, his mouth a hard line twisted at the corners with pain. He was dressed in his shirt and his riding cloak. All his trappings, shield, embroidered tunic, his rich sword-belt—everything—was strapped on to his horse's back. In his hand he held his sword.

"Matthew," he said, and now his voice came soft and deep, different, without the rasp in it. "Tell the King what his once Seneschal says:—that he regards the King's person as sacred; that the King's office is all that shields him; tell him that he will find a good account of my stewardship; that he will never see me again; that I renounce all lands, goods, houses, moneys, or other signs of this world's estate. Tell him that although I failed my God by placing my trust in princes, that I do not fail Our Blessed Lady by trusting my wife, whom I am sure by the same token, he has wilfully and cruelly maligned. And tell him lastly that the

Lord John de Braunche, Seneschal of the Little Kingdom, is dead."

I held up my hand.

"Dead to the world, Matthew. Now go."

I turned and was about to leave him when he called me back.

"Take this sword," he said, but held it firm: it had been his father's.

Then he said, "Good sword," and dropped it on the ground, meaning, I think, to have said more, but not daring.

"For the King?" I queried.

"The sea," he answered regarding it, and made an action as if casting it from him.

Here I left the Seneschal in his shirt and cloak, nor saw him again till some months after—as shall be told.

The King, his face already puffy with excess, received my message in sulky silence, and I left his presence not knowing what to do.

In Borewood, about three miles into the depths of the forest, was a ruin. It lay in a sort of a cup or shovel-shaped depression, through which a stream of clear water ran. The ruin itself was in a good state, all the walls of stones and rubble remaining intact. The roof alone had perished,

and the few beams remaining were wreathed with thick ivy, which grew up all over two sides of the building.

The exact history of the place was lost in traditional stories of all sorts and kinds. Some said it had been built by a hermit with his own hands, for a chapel; others had stories of witches and fairies; others again said that the mad King Odin had caused it to be built for a hunting lodge.

Sufficient to say that it remained, and that it was here that the Seneschal went, and here that I joined him in January of the year after his wife had died in the Sorcerer's Tower, seven months after she had been placed there by ill-will of the King.

I found ten men here, two priests, my old master, and seven men whom I guessed to be outlaws and robbers. All these were living in a monastic brotherhood, under a rule invented and ordered by the Seneschal, now called Godman John by all his fellows, as indeed was each man called after his name as Godman Peter, or Godman Antony.

The Seneschal embraced me with much sweetness and called me brother and faithful servant—(Lord have mercy on me for that moment of stinking pride!). Godman John, as he would have me call him, was studying to become a priest by

the following January, when the bishop, it was hoped, would pass near by on his way to the town. He gave to me the reason and explanation of the brotherhood, called Godmen of the Wood. How it had often grieved him in the world to think of the poor outlaws and robbers, hunted from this and other kingdoms, who had come here to die without hope of salvation.

How sometimes, like wounded birds part killed by arrows, they had crept under bushes to die, unshrived, unblessed. How now he and his fellows roamed the woods to help such persons, and found many, and also on the edge of the wood, children of tender age left to die, without the baptismal key to heaven. One only of these had lived—a girl, whom he had sent by Godman Antony to a certain holy woman at Emms. In short, any number of curious happenings in so brief a space of time.

I cast in my lot with them happily and to this day have found it the sweetest and most comfortable life. Now that our little church is enriched with carvings and fair paintings and our high altar rests upon some blessed relics of blessed Saint Wite; now that many come to us from afar and are sent away healed, soul and body,—it seems strange to

look back on the days when we laboured to build huts, and cut rough furniture for our church, and netted fish for our dinner, or went begging vegetables for our broth.

Daily our dear founder grew in grace and beautiful humility, and became so gentle-natured that wild animals, fearsome beasts for which I had no stomach, would come to him and he would heal their wounds as best he knew.

Part of the wood near to us we cleared of trees that we might till the rich soil and grow such grains or roots as were necessary for our health.

After our midday meal, one of the fathers who were with us, would come to the end of the row of little wood huts and say in a loud voice, "Eamus ad opus manuum"—"Let us go to our manual labour"—and we would come from our huts where each man meditated and slept, and go to our work, singing.

I myself being a fair writer, wrote out all the offices for the church, and did some pretty enough scrolls and ornaments, where I thought fit.

Oh! the fair days when I might sit outside my hut in recreation time and indeed often for days together, for at first the life made me in bad health, and saw all the birds sit upon branches to sing, and

the rabbits come from their holes to look about and nibble! These, as all of God's creatures that I knew, I put in margins, together also with beasts which were revealed me in dreams, notably a great thing I once saw in my sleep, with black horns—which is found on the opening page of our Vesper-book.

Only two of our number left us, one on business to the bishop, with our rules written out clean for his supervision, and one Antony, who ran away, we thought, with a strange woman, who peered at us one day as we cut trees. May Heaven forgive all I have thought against Antony in this matter, and also forgive certain words by Antony against me.

Now all of this is round writing and confusing of the time, as much happened after the event of which I wish to speak.

The year grew old. December approached, and all of us prayed that Godman John might be ordained by the bishop, and that our brotherhood might so be made firm and blessèd.

At court, in the town, the King was dropping all his companions, and drinking night after night alone.

The death of Lady Clare threw him into a terrible state of mind, so that people said he was awful to look on in his rage.

Some say who should know, that the poor lady died of a broken heart alone in her prison; but it was not the Seneschal's name they found scratched on the walls.

With hunting and drinking the King passed his days, and the Prince was kept away from his sight, for he called the baby terrible names.

People said that he could be heard when he sat alone in his chamber, yelling and singing and talking to some imaginary persons, and cursing God, asking to be left alone with the devil.

Every day as he rode out to hunt, or rode alone, to ride miles and miles, sometimes killing his horse, sometimes leading one sweating and foaming and trembling up to the gates, he felt the tower of the sorcerer look on him as if it had an eye to see him wherever he went.

For miles round could the tower be seen. Even in Borewood, which lay on the side of a range of hills and spread over them, and round for many miles; it was only on the low ground, or over the hills, that the town and the tower disappeared.

Not that the King ever came by our part of the forest, but rode always to east or west of us by the tracks.

One day, however, a year and nine months after

the Queen's death, a cold, bleak day in January, he rode all day in the forest, was overtaken by darkness, and lost himself.

At the hour of recreation after the evening collation, when we were waiting for compline and warming ourselves in the little common-room we had built, we heard a voice calling out of the darkness.

Godman John, the Seneschal, now to-day a priest, had said his first mass that morning, and was to hear his first confessions that night before bed; he was not with us, but at his prayers in the church.

I fear me that we did not stir as we should have done on the sound of the voice, but continued warming ourselves by the fire. So often voices were heard in the darkness and nothing came of it—some to-night half moved to go out, but did not; one said it was a lost soul.

The voice called out again more distant—then one said it was a devil, another some animal mocking us.

The bell tolled for compline and we rose hurriedly, when there came a great knocking at the door.

Why on this particular night we should have feared such a sound, I do not know, but we all did, until Father Paris, an old man, went to the door.

I did not know it, but a heavy fall of snow had

begun, and as the door opened, the snowflakes blew in and melted with the heat of the room.

The snow had deadened all sound of the stranger's approach. A great figure filled the door space and then half rolled in, and Father Paris closed the door.

At once I knew it to be the King, in spite of his long grey beard and grey hair, in spite of his huge bulk all grown fat, his bloodshot eyes, his purple bloated face—but I held my tongue.

"Well, damned silent miserable skinflints, can't you see by the grace of God that you have a man among you for once?" He cried all this out in a thick voice.

The bell was still tolling.

"What fat hell full of snivellers have I tripped into?" he said. "Make way for a King."

"There is only one King, sire," said Father Paris.

"Well, old pot-belly, and curse you for your sinful ignorance, give way for the fire."

Without speaking we agreed to leave him to sober by the fire and we filed out to compline.

"Pray for me," he called out as we left, "that I may have a cup of spiced wine to my stomach, and a sweet forest girl to sing me to sleep."

We left him sprawling on a bench.

It was at the end of compline when we were all turned to the Crucifix and the Pater, Ave and Credo were being said, that we heard him enter the church. "A miracle," he said in a whisper.

Father John had given the signal and we rose from our knees to go, but the King's voice stopped us.

He came up to the step by the sanctuary and knelt down, then he said, "Fathers, whoever you may be, hear me. I came by here in the snow, and seeing a light I came close to this place and found it was a church. I looked for some place to tie up my horse, and found outside a wood crucifix by the door; to the feet of Him, whom I curse daily, I tied the reins of my horse and came then to knock at the door under which I had seen the light. When you had gone in to your prayers, I heard Greffour neigh in a peculiar manner and I came out to see what ailed her. Before God, may He be merciful to me a sinner, I saw Him bend down and untie the reins from His feet, and my horse stood still and quiet, but neighing as if he knew his Master."

He dropped his voice, "A miracle."

Father John, his face lit by a wonderful sweet look, came down, his cowl was over his face; he

seemed lifted above all earthly beings; he did not recognize the King.

"My son," he said, "it is my first day as a priest, will you make your confession to me?"

The King's head was bent, he did not see the father's face.

"Will God pardon such as me?" he said, and all saw how he trembled.

"Though thy sins be as scarlet, I will make them as white as snow." Father John spoke in a strange voice, which seemed hardly human.

Father Paris made a sign for us all to go, and so we did, through the little door, to our common-room, instead of to our huts as usual.

The lights remained on the altar. The King knelt where he was.

The Seneschal put back his cowl, and waited, praying by himself.

Then the flood of words, choked by tears, hindered by heavy breathing, all the sins of the past time rippling away from the man's bared soul; self-accusation, awful revelation of a life of purposeful devil's work; women, drink, evil deeds,—all in the dim light, coming from the King's lips fouled by oaths, false kisses and blasphemies, all the soul of him shivering under God's hand, till

... his wife's name, al
came a great happiness as he lifte
gave the Absolution.
he King looked up, saw him, gave
fell upon the floor of the sanctuary.
n hour later he died, after receivi
e from the hands of Father John.
ı his last moments he raised himsel
h we had made for him in the churcl
ill you carry me into the town by I
ıed only in your poor habit, rich fr
your body?"
ather John lifted his hand in assent.
hen again the King said, half delirio
e, I ask in all humility pardon for
": then "Arnice," and last of all: "Y
ıgs, and with a tattered company—L
ive my soul."
o the King died, and we carried him c

THE FOURTH YEAR

LAUGHTER IN SOLEMN PLACES

IT was the fourth year of the King's life, the first year of his reign, and a great drought was over the land. The river Candida, never a great stream at any time, except where it met the sea, was reduced to a thin neck of water and shrunken pools where all the fish congregated.

The distress of the people was frightful. The wells dried up, the fresh-water fish were netted, the mackerel gone from the coast to deeper water, the cows ceased to give milk and were thin and wasted; birds fell from trees dead, corn ripened, shrivelled and fell out of the ear on to parched ground. The water meadows along the banks of the river dried up, for the first time in any living man's memory. The drought brought with it a plague of flies, gnats and mosquitoes, which tormented the sheep and the beasts, caused loathsome diseases, stung children, and made life unbearable.

Over the land, as far as one could see, a heavy dust hung, hedges and fields were powdered white,

and the streets in the town were inches deep in it. Sometimes the sun shone overhead in a sky of leaden blue, sometimes a hot haze hung over everything. No one knew whether to open their windows or keep them closed and darkened with curtains.

It was not a good omen for the baby King that his reign should commence at such a time.

Then a fever started in the low quarters near the Jewry, and the people died in their hovels and were buried at night outside the walls.

The only people who kept quite clean from pestilence were the fisher-folk and boat-builders on the sea side of the town.

The wells that did not immediately dry up were foul and polluted. The soldiers took charge of any clean wells or pools of water and saw that none was wasted. Murder was done for bread, and robbery for cups of milk. It was a dreadful season.

The doles of bread ceased perforce at the abbey, and the poor Franciscans fared badly in their begging. When poor folk came travelling and said their "Hail, Mary" at the God's Rest House for a meal, they took their gruel with sour faces and toiled away from such a niggard town, along dusty roads, hoping for better fare elsewhere.

Where the roof of a convent was being mended

three men fell from sunstroke, and the other labourers refused to go on with their task. Dame Catherine, the head of the establishment, urged them soundly, beginning with prayers and ending with womanly abuse which calmed down to sympathy and from sympathy to actual help.

Robert Hyrenmonger, and John le Slater, and Edward Irish and others, were given work to do for the convent which was invented on the moment by the good dame. Richard the cooper made salting tubs against the winter. All the conventual establishments gave what work they could to relieve the sufferings of the poor, but in such heat it was hard to do much heavy work; and many orders given out were at a standstill.

On the twenty-eighth of July it was reported that the ship "La Magdalene" had struck rock near the cove of St. Gabriel's and was breaking up rapidly.

All the town turned out, and all who could ran over to the downs and across the heath to St. Gabriel's, and there massed on the shore to see the wreck break up. The sea was like oil, but it beat the torn vessel slowly but surely, and when she broke up the cargo of wine floated on to the beach. The vessel had been closely packed with the barrels, and the scene, as they bobbed and

floated towards the shore on the incoming tide, was like a mad dream. The fishermen launched their small boats to reach the stuff first. Two sank with the weight of the people who rushed on to them.

Then three men in a line, tied to each other by ropes, swam out to the barrels and pushed them towards the shore. The first ashore were seized on by so many that they were broken up and the red wine spilt so that a great stream flowed from the crowd into the sea ; children trying to dam the stream with their hands in the sand, scooped up the wine and sand in the cups of their hands and spat it out for the salt taste, old women, with crutches, fighting and hitting with them.

Strong men guarded the next barrels and tapped them for the benefit of the crowd. People searched along the beach for any other morsel of wreckage. The sun made the sea and the sand, stones and cliffs, quiver with heat. As the news spread, the downs became dotted with people running to see what had happened, and the beach became full of half-tipsy fishermen, and drunken old women and sleepy intoxicated children.

At noon the King's men and some knights rode down and restored some sort of order among the

crowd. The wine was gone long ago, but the men remained to guard against wilder scenes.

Most of the people slept where they lay on the beach that night, and woke fresher for the clean air, astonished to see a wattle protection made on the downs over above them, a sort of canopy to cover an altar.

They were still more astonished when the busy Franciscans came among them and told them that mass would be said outside on the hill.

After that half the town slept out by the sea, on the downs, or the beach, and did what little work there was in the fields, returning to their outdoor beds at eventide.

Still, week after week the sun blazed on, and no sign of rain was apparent. They took the baby King to a summer-house near by the sea, and guarded him carefully. There were not wanting those who said evil things of your infant rulers, said evil things and looked ready to back them by deeds.

Peter, the King, flourished exceedingly and grew plump, and was rosy and fine, despite the heat.

Some knights, who owed allegiance to the King, took advantage of this state of affairs, and rode out miles beyond the kingdom to do mischief on

one of the great roads. Here Esmonde Oddynles and Sir John de Hamstall stood with fifty men beneath Orle Wood, and at night raided the lands and cattle of Sir Cuthbert of Kyme Hollow, made away with his daughter and five other maids, killed Sir Cuthbert at the door of the women's apartments as he stood fighting in a shirt, and threw his body into a moat.

They burst into the barn of a priory and fed their horses on the way home; but they reckoned without the vengeance of the King's constable, the master of Langton, Sir Arthur de Brynchesley, cousin to Cuthbert of Kyme, and met a proper fate at his hands.

Early one August morning a company rode out of the town and took road for Hamstall, the horses kicking up thick clouds of white dust; the men, their helmets swung at the saddle, laughing and joking; the constable's colours flying with the King's, showing at first bright through the dust, soon dulled with it.

The townsfolk watched the company from the walls and saw it dwindle in a little moving cloud of dust, then lost it in the distance. Watched two days later and saw over Borewood a thin column of smoke go up in the air, and in the late afternoon

some watchers called to others to notice the sun's rays flash on armour by the wood.

The company came back less twenty-eight men and three knights, but increased by Lady Alice of Kyme and two girls, the other two having died from sunstroke on the way.

Still the air was heavy, and the ground opened in great fissures, and the grass browned, the heather died, the gorse fell.

At the beginning of September the abbot caused it to be given out all over the Little Kingdom that a solemn high mass would be sung on the feast of the translation of St. Cuthbert, to be followed by a special prayer for rain.

The feast fell on a Sunday, and on Saturday the market-place was decked out like a fair; booths were erected for the people who came in from the country, and these made regular little streets of shelters.

It was spread about that the King would be in the abbey.

Such provisions as were procurable were brought in by all the people from outside the walls; much was given in charity; farmers brought cheeses and bread, some came with fowls, some with dressed sheep, or oxen—to be roasted in open places after the mass.

Ladies gave jewels and gold some weeks before for " ung bel exemplaire," and these were made into the form of a golden ark, outside of which stood Noe and his family, the whole studded with the jewels.

Hermits came from their cells and camped near by the town, the Fen men came up to the city walls, tall thin men, many of them bent with the ague.

Anne atte Wode, a wise woman, walked up the main street and round about the town, praying loud and tearing her hair.

Then on Saturday night, when the sun had gone down, a company of knights and ladies, surrounding a horse litter, rode into the town from the King's summer-house, having the baby King in their midst, passed through the silent crowds and up to the castle.

That night seemed the hottest and most oppressive of any of the long hot nights during the drought.

The abbey was filled to suffocation, the heat was stifling ; the incense hung in clouds where it was swung. All the doors were wide open, and the hot quivering stones of the market-place seemed to send additional heat into the building.

When the sanctus bell rang, Anne atte Wode went mad in the church and forced her way up the

nave to the great screen, calling on God and foaming at the mouth. It took six fishermen to carry her away.

In the silence, while the priest was receiving the sacred wafer, one could hear the heavy breathing of the people and the mutterings of prayers. The slight noise of the swinging censer made a jar on the silence that shook the people whose nerves where overstrung.

Now a man's voice, rising above a whisper in his anxiety, would call, "Lord, ha' mercy." Now some woman fainted and was carried out.

Right in front of the screen, in sight of all the people, was a seat covered with cloth of gold, on which sat the King, sleepy, dazed.

On either side of him the greatest lords and ladies in the kingdom.

The subdeacon fell with a crash on the altar steps and was carried out.

There was a feeling in the air as if God Himself was leaning down from heaven, about to strike a blow.

Outside one could see that it was darker, more awful, and the heat was intense.

At the "Ite Missa Est" the crowd stirred somewhat; now was to come the great prayer.

The abbot and the guardian of the Franciscans came out, followed by all the friars and monks. These knelt in front of the King, facing the altar, in sight of all the people.

The choir lifted their voices and sang the "Kyrie Eleison."

There was a silence, during which the heat seemed almost solid, as if waves of hot air beat on the kneeling crowd.

The abbot held his arms extended and began to pray.

"O Lord God Almighty, who hast stretched out Thy hand over this land and visited it with a burning pestilence, look now on the sufferings of Thy people who cry to Thee in their need. Heed us, O God, we pray Thee, and be merciful to us. . . ."

The abbot was an old man and his voice faltered, but he went on—"O God, hear us" but he could go no further, his voice broke; he loved his people like a father, and he could not bear to see their suffering. Then with a sob he buried his head in his hands and cried. In the abbey, now nearly dark, the sound of this old man's crying was awful. He conquered himself and was about to go on. There was a tense silence everywhere.

Suddenly and without warning the baby King

laughed. His shrill notes rang through the still air, and the people shook.

It got, for one moment, darker—there was a blinding flash of lightning and a crash of thunder, and then the rain streamed down in torrents. In a moment the abbey was a pandemonium, people rushing, passed others, praising God in loud voices —tearing, pushing, buffeting, to reach the doors.

The monks remained where they knelt.

Outside the abbey, the people stood in the rain, not fearing the storm, never heeding the torrents. The dust sopped up the rain and became thick mud ; the shelters were struck down. There was pervading the air that peculiar aromatic scent the parched earth gives out in thankful recognition for the advent of grateful rain. People embraced each other, old enemies found themselves talking together as friends. All were talking of one thing, all agreed on one point, it was the laugh of the innocent baby that had brought this miracle to pass.

Some one began to call out "the King," and now as the boy was carried out of church, the Lord Constable's cloak over him for shelter, people ran to call to him and knelt in the mud and threw their clothes down for him, so he was carried along dry-footed to the very doors of the castle.

The horses tied up near by the abbey, terrified by the noise and the lightning, kicked and tried to bolt, and the pages and squires held fast to them.

Knights and ladies passed, cheered by the people, and ran for their houses sooner than mount and ride. All doors were thrown open and every one made merry. Strangers sat down in strangers' houses and laughed immoderately. At each clap of thunder boys called out and drenched girls in doorways answered them.

In the abbey, now deserted, the old abbot knelt alone by the altar, his hands upon it, tears streaming down his face, thanking his Lord for this mercy in his heart, for he could find no words.

After this there was not one person, man, woman, or child, who would not have laid down his life for the baby King, and the love of the idle and rough for his father, and the love of the soft and sober-minded for his mother, was transferred to the person of the King. The people had what all peoples require, some one person placed above them whom they might love.

THE FIFTH YEAR

THE STORY OF THE RED COW

"MADAM," said the King, for he was a polite baby, "why are there no blue rabbits? There's a fish."

Luckily for Lady Alice, the fish and its doings blotted the disturbing rabbit from the King's mind. They were sitting on the grassy bank of the river, a mile outside the town. Here the river was small and little more than a quick-running stream. Where they sat the water had hollowed out into a pool and lay deep and quiet. The opposite bank was high rock, on the top of which grew dwarf oaks and ferns with all manner of undergrowth, which hung over and shadowed the pool.

Where they sat the sloping bank of grass was covered with daisies.

Ten yards away was a wooden bridge, wide and strong, across which cows were driven into the water meadows.

The King sat as near the edge of the water as he was allowed and peered into the depths inquisitively.

He was dressed entirely in white and his rich brown hair was bound by a plain gold circlet.

Lady Alice was also in white, as were all the King's immediate servants. She was a girl of twenty, with a broad handsome face which was framed in black hair that hung about her shoulders. Her mouth was the subtle part of her, it expressed all her emotions before they showed in her eyes; the corners of her mouth were soft, deep, and plastic, full of humour.

The trees on the opposite bank threw their shadows across the stream to the bank whereon they sat, and the shade was grateful on the hot summer morning.

The white bridge shone in the sun and its twisted reflection in the water was dazzling. There was a sound of drowsy humming in the air from the insects—it was very still and peaceful.

"I have a mind to speak with a fish," said the King. "I would say Master Fish, where goest thou, and the fish would reply—what would he say, madam?"

"I cannot tell, sire," said Lady Alice.

The King opened his eyes wide; he thought, then asked for a piece of cake. Lady Alice gave him a little cake from a basket; he screwed up a

morsel between finger and thumb and threw the pellet into the water.

The fish was away like a flash.

"Oh, come back, Fish," said the King plaintively.

Some cows came over the bridge and gazed stupidly about, until a voice from behind them called, and they lumbered clumsily into the meadow. Then a girl in a blue smock appeared carrying a switch, a daisy stalk between her lips, the flower twisting and turning in her mouth as she played with the stalk. She saw the King, reddened, bobbed her courtesy, and walked over the bridge.

The King rolled round and faced Lady Alice, propping his head on his hands.

"Dear Alice," he said in his winning way, "a story."

This was part of her duty, to amuse the King and keep him healthy and out in the open.

"A story," she said, her hand plucking at the grass, "what about?"

"A cow," replied the King at once.

She thought for a while, a smile playing about the corners of her mouth; she looked this way and that, collecting her thoughts; she knew his moods, felt his serious eyes watching her face, then she shook her head to free her face of her long hair and began.

"'Twas told me by a speckled hen," she said. The King's baby face took a look of great satisfaction.

"'A certain king had a great desire to see a red cow. His kingdom was small, a castle, twenty houses and ten farms. On these ten farms were fifty cows—these cows were black cows and white cows and black-and-white cows.'"

The King nodded.

"'The Queen kept fowls and would listen to no talk of cows, so the hen said, she was a Queen's hen, and took little count of cows herself. But the Princess Desonelle was friends with the King and not over anxious in the matter of hens, so she passed her day at the King's express wish reading, studying, thinking, wondering about cows. Poor Princess, in time she lost interest in the subject, but her father kept her at it day by day, until she became almost a prisoner in her rooms over this fancy that he had. Day by day he would knock on the door of her room and call out "Desonelle," and she would reply, "Yes, father." "Have you thought of a way to get us a red cow?" he would call out, and she had to reply, "No, father."'"

"Can you know what chickens say?" asked the King.

"Oh, yes," said Lady Alice.

"Will I?" asked the King.

"When you grow up," said Lady Alice, "you will know a great many things."

"Go on, dear Alice," said the King.

"'Well, matters grew to such a pitch that the King issued a proclamation to say that he would give his daughter and half the kingdom, the half with only four farms on it, to any one who would bring him a red cow. And he left Desonelle shut up in a tower, studying, reading, planning, and wondering how to get a red cow.

"'Poor Desonelle, she looked out of her tower windows and wished all cows at the bottom of the sea.'"

"Are there cows at the bottom of the sea?" asked the King.

"There are a great many things at the bottom of the sea," replied Lady Alice, quite gravely.

"'Now one day when the King had gone a long distance away, two kingdoms off, to confer with Master Bone the wizard, the Princess determined to escape from her tower and her studies to her old nurse, who now lived at the White Farm. She knew the King would be away two days and three nights; she knew that her mother, the Queen,

would be busy over sittings and hatchings, eggs and feathers, plucking and stuffing, so that could she only get out of the tower, across the garden and out of the walls unseen, she would never be missed for a day, anyhow. So she made up her mind and acted quickly. She put a hood over her head, opened her door, and ran downstairs as hard as she could, calling to the maids on the second floor and the men in the guard-room—

"'I have an idea, I have an idea!

"'They were quite deceived and let her pass, muttering among themselves, "the Princess has an idea."

"'Out into the garden, through the gate, down the lane, through the village, panting and flurried, all in a moment, so Desonelle escaped. She threw herself down on a bank.'"

The King looked at the bank they then sat upon —"Just such a place," said Lady Alice.

"'She remembered the talk at home, how the Queen had said to the King, "Let the girl alone, teach her something useful, as how to feed hens or rear young chickens—out upon your stupid cows." And the King would reply: "You hear what your mother says," but he would smile covertly at Desonelle as if to say, "you and I know better."

She thought of the delicious country, and how good it was to be out of the tower. In front of her, smiling fields neat ploughed, and little hills. Cow-bells tinkling, a windmill creaking in the breeze. And over there, the forest, where charcoal-burners plied their dreary trade, and witches flew by night.'"

Lady Alice stopped, the King was not attending, his head was tilted up and he looked into the sky.

"What is it?" she asked.

"If I were four birds," said he, "I wouldn't fly in a row, because the behind one can't see anything."

Lady Alice looked up and saw four wild geese flying, their long necks outstretched, in the stillness she could hear the song of their wings.

"Shall I go on?" she asked.

"I love the story," said the King.

"'Desonelle arrived at the White Farm, saw her old nurse, told her all the story of her escape, and waited to be coddled. "Oh, but you must go back," said the nurse. "I shall not go back," said Desonelle, "I shall stop here all day." She went out and met her old playmate, Petronilla. "Petronilla," says Desonelle, "I am lonely." "Desonelle," says Petronilla, "I am busy." By

this you see that they resumed their old relations at once. And with that Desonelle takes up the milk-pail and Petronilla the stool.'"

"You must know," said Lady Alice, that the hens had been fed, so I was told particularly by the speckled hen."

"Oh, this is still as you heard the story from the hen," said the King. "Go on."

"Yes," said Lady Alice, "still as the hen told me, and she said also that the Princess Desonelle, in a manner that reminded the hen of the Queen, pushed a broody hen from a box of straw to the great annoyance of that hen.——'Well, the girls talked, and gossiped, and chattered and sang as they did in old days. They milked the cows and fed the pigs and collected the eggs; then what a dinner waited for them at the farm.'"

"What did they have for dinner?" asked the King.

"Plums," said Lady Alice, "and puddings and cakes and cream cheese."

"And figs?" said the King.

"Yes, they had figs besides," said Lady Alice, laughing, "'after which there was quite a to do about the Princess. The nurse said she must go, Desonelle cried to be allowed to stay, and Petronilla

said nothing. The farmer grew serious, he didn't want to get into trouble with the King, and he knew the Princess least of any of them, so that he was rather afraid of her. At last Desonelle said to Petronilla, looking at her hard, "Petronilla, you must take my place, oh! you must—come now, I will be obeyed, please do—oh! you must—it's quite easy, it is indeed—why, any old anything could do it, why I'd do it myself if it wasn't me. All you have to do is to change into my clothes, get into the castle garden up to the tower, muffle your face in my hood, call out 'I have an idea about a red cow,' and run upstairs, shut the door, and refuse to be interrupted." Petronilla protested, the farmer he said "nay" and "how now" and "to hark at the maid," but the old nurse said "she's white is my deary, and Petronilla shall do it." What a commotion there was, and a great comparing of the two girls and more instructions, finally tears, kisses, blessings, and off went Petronilla to the castle.'"

The King was enchanted, he gurgled into laughter, he followed each step with breathless interest, and when Lady Alice said that Petronilla actually did go to the tower, and run up the steps calling out "I have an idea for a red cow," he rolled over in the grass in delight.

"'The next morning,'" said Lady Alice, laughing too, "'Desonelle was up betimes and out to milk the cows. Now she had been told to particularly care for one cow, a white cow, and to milk her last, because the cow, besides being the favourite, was believed to have some mysterious connection with the fairies.'"

Lady Alice waited to see what effect this announcement would have upon the King, it had the desired result, his eyes grew big with joy.

"'Desonelle milked all the cows in turn. Mary, they were called, and Ann, and Crysede, and Maid, and Blossom, and other names—all these until she came to the white cow, whom they called Emeline. The morning was warm and Desonelle was tired, so she sat down on the stool beside the cow and thought lazily. Emeline, the white cow, had her mind busy too. That very morning in the field she had heard a conversation between Robert the goose-herd and John the cowherd, and this is what she heard.

"'"I wish for the maid and I do not know what to do," quoth Robert.

"'"Ask her," said John. "My heart turns to water and my knees shake like reeds," said Robert. "Up with heart, man, and prepare thy

words," said John; "take her in a storm," added this wiseacre, "fly at her and kiss her, 'tis what maids like best." "Is that true?" said Robert, scratching his poll. "So certain sure as I stand here, and may the earth shake like a watery cheese if I lie," said John; "like an egg without a shell may the earth be, and a snout grow out of my face, if I tell thee not the truth, Robert." The wise cow knew then that Robert plucked at what courage he had, and, indeed, heard him say, "This very day will I do as you bid by the same tokens."—As Desonelle mused, so the cow thought also, and wondered what was going to happen. Robert, full of courage, came softly over the grass and saw his lady love, as he thought, sitting on the milking-stool with her back towards him. Emeline, the white cow, was in a quiver of excitement, and also in a state of nervous modesty.'"

"Yes," said the King, not understanding.

"'She was shy,'" said Lady Alice. "'Robert approached softly, took a little run, seized the Princess in his arms and kissed her. The white cow trembled and felt an extraordinary change coming over her, a hot feeling coursed through her body, and she began to turn a faint pink; she was actually blushing. You can imagine the confusion of the poor goose-

herd, tears welled up into his eyes, he lost all power of speech, he sank on his knees. Desonelle was so astonished that she half laughed and half cried, but ended in laughing altogether, when she was stopped by the appearance of the cow. "Look!" she cried, "Look!" Robert looked and saw the cow. Emeline was rapidly changing colour, getting every moment redder and redder, until at last she seemed to reach the most beautiful of reds and there stop. "The red cow!" whispered Desonelle. Robert, on his knees, fumbled to get at a holy medal, but it was so tangled on a string with a charm against witches that his shaking fingers could not detach it. "Up, man," said the Princess, "up man, and let us drive her to the castle." Her calm restored him, and he rose from his knees to do as he was bid. Together they drove Emeline to the gate of the castle and there met the King, who was waiting in a furious rage, having returned early and found Petronilla in the tower. But when he saw Desonelle returning with a red cow his joy knew no bounds. "My daughter," he cried, "child of my heart." Petronilla stood behind him weeping. "Who is this excellent person?" said the King. "Can it be Robert the gooseherd?" "Aye," said Robert, not yet recovered from his excitement, "it

be I." A thought crossed the King's mind, and Desonelle noticed his anxiety. "Good Robert," she said, "wishes to wed Petronilla, my old playmate." The worried look vanished from the King's face, he had dreaded that Robert would claim the reward of his daughter and half the kingdom. "Is this true, excellent Robert?" he asked. "Aye," said Robert, "it be." "What is it they say?" whispered the King to the Princess. "Wilt thou have this maid to thy wife?" she prompted. "Wilt thou have this maid to thy wife? and, maid, dost thou desire this man?" he said. "I wilt," said Robert. "Your Majesty," said Petronilla, kneeling, "I dearly love him."—And so all was well. As for the red cow, Emeline, she remained that wonderful colour for the rest of her life. She lived in a pure white cowshed with a coloured pavement and had many children, all as red as berries. So they got red cows in that kingdom, and from that kingdom they spread all over the world.'"

Lady Alice stopped and took the King's hand. "Tired?" she said.

"Dear Alice, I should like to lean my head in your lap awhile," said the King.

So she gathered him up into her arms and sang him to sleep.

THE SIXTH YEAR

THE STORY OF THE VIOLETS

PETER, the King, in his sixth year, was as sturdy and brave as a boy may be, and what he lacked in inches he made up in a quaint wisdom, which won to him the hearts of his people.

It came about that an argument was brought before the Lord Constable, who dispensed justice for the King in the great hall, and that on that day the King himself was in the gallery of the hall.

Robert the Weaver and John of Trees came with Mary, the miller's daughter, and stood before the Constable. There began a wordy dispute between the two men, the pith of which was this: Robert and John loved Mary.

On alternate days in a year they had courted her, having arranged this plan, for they were sworn cronies.

Now here was a year passed and over, and still Mary gave no sign, and would not lean to one or other—what could be done?

John swore that Robert persuaded the girl against

him with lies and false stories, and Robert protested that John used evil spells, which he cast over Mary and her love for him.

The upshot of it was that they had persuaded the miller to command Mary to attend with them before the Lord Constable, who was to make the girl speak.

There stood Mary, demure, her hands clasped in front of her, her eyes on the ground, never saying a word. The Lord Constable called upon her as "my good girl," and urged these "worthy fellows," and "a girl's bounden duty," without producing anything but a series of bobs and curtseys.

Then the King ran from the gallery down into the hall and walked up beside the Lord Constable.

"I will do this," he said.

All the grave persons about were amazed and distressed, but the Constable held up his hand to stay any words, and gave up his seat to the King.

When the King had seated himself, he called out, "Let some one bring a daisy."

One of the people about the doorway ran out and plucked a daisy from the grass.

"Now," said the King to the miller's daughter,

"Come near to me, Mary, and stand in front of me."

He looked at her out of his grave eyes and from her to the men behind. Then he gave her the daisy.

"Pluck this," he said, "petal by petal, calling on Robert and then John, one name for each petal."

The girl held the daisy between her thumb and finger and commenced counting. "Robert," and the first white petal fluttered to the ground, "John," "Robert"—"John," "Robert," until but a few petals remained.

Then men were in a breathless excitement, and the people left the doorways and the sides of the hall to come closer.

The Constable stood on the dais behind the King smiling into his hand.

It was a tiny lawn daisy and hard to see.

"Robert," a petal dropped off, "John"—the girl crushed the daisy in her hand and turned to John of Trees.

The tension was over, John of Trees took the girl and kissed her then and there. Robert, with a reverence to the King, turned to go out of the hall.

The King signed for John and Mary to remain—then he said, when Robert was out of the doorway, "Mary, open your hand."

She turned very red and began to cry, but the Lord Constable frowned at her and said, "Open it, girl."

She did so and the daisy dropped out of it with one white petal still remaining.

There was a moment of silence and then the Constable roared with laughter, then those about the King started, and soon the story spread about and the hall was filled with a laughing crowd.

Mary was red and near tears again, John bursting with pride.

The King dismissed them, saying to Mary as she went, "I saw."

So his name and his person were beloved by everybody.

"Your Majesty," said the Constable, "has dispensed true justice."

"For which I shall expect an entertainment this afternoon," replied King Peter.

Oh, the grave councillors after he had left them, how they pulled their beards and smiled and nudged one another!

Now the Lord Constable's ideas for entertainment

were principally limited to food and drink, and tournaments, and at so short a notice he could do none of these things. He cudgelled his brains for a while, ending in what he imagined to be a brilliant idea. Two stalwart fellows with quarter-staffs were to fight on a green in the castle gardens, to be followed by cakes and ale.

In the afternoon the King went about prying in corners to discover what was to be done to entertain him. When he did find out he decided against that form of entertainment, and cast about for some one to sit with him in the garden from whom he could get a story.

The press of State affairs that afternoon seemed extraordinary—one must go hither, another to such a man, a third, at the risk of the King's displeasure, must do this and that.

There was a certain knight, Sir Godfrey, a sallow man with a scar across his face, whom the King found in the armoury. Sir Godfrey was explaining to a master armourer some greave or joint that he wished made in a suit. The King had tiptoed in and stood waiting. The talked ceased for a moment and he came forward. Instantly Sir Godfrey turned and saluted him.

"I would see this contrivance," said the King.

Then the master armourer, a mighty man, his hands covered with grease from his business, held up that piece of armour that they had been discussing, and in the polished surface the King saw his face distorted and the room with the specks of light shining.

He stretched out his hand to take Sir Godfrey's, looked again, turned to Sir Godfrey, and made his request.

"Will you tell me a story, stern lord, a story of something—I care not—what you will?"

Hand in hand they went out into the garden. Hard by was a certain small door through which they passed, then into an agreeable solitude with trees very artificially cut, where there were flowers debonair, and a fountain played. A seat was here of raised turf; soft and cool the summer breeze blew; the flowers gave forth their sweet odours, and the water splashed lazily into the basin of the fountain. The seat was made all comfortable with a back to lean upon, and here Sir Godfrey placed his mantle for the King's ease.

Peter spoke no word, but waited happily for the fulfilment of his desire.

So, and in this manner, Sir Godfrey began his story:—

King Peter

"It is not of wars and battles that I shall tell, but of a certain King and a maid and a flower, Violet called. This puissant and most noble King, Richard by name, ruled over many lands by strength of arms and fair justice. He dressed in fine clothes of green and gold and wore a crown, wherein slept jewels, those fair eyes which guard the secrets of the earth. Fine horses he had and dogs, hawks had he, and many strange pets. His people loved him. What more could such a one desire?

"All these things he had, but he was lonely and remote. So great was his estate, and he was placed above men so high, that in the midst of peoples, lands, and fair towns, he was alone—as far apart from friends as if he lived upon a star. He was too great to dare to have a friend, and did he show preferment to one or other of his court, for certain would that man be spoken of as favourite, and spiteful intrigues would arise and spoil the fairness of that King's peace.

"A certain old lord who had been councillor to his father was nearest to the King by reason of his princely birth, being of the House Royal, and to him the King took his complaint of loneliness.

"'I am great,' he said, 'yet I cannot command

love. I am powerful, yet without a friend—a friend to whom the little longings, the tiny secrets might be told. A man to whom I might always open my heart and lay bare my soul; a man to love my humours, to bear with my black moods, to chide me as a friend, nor fear me as a King, a man——'

"'A woman?' said the old lord, in a tone of questioning.

"'A woman?' said the King; 'would she know of these things—a woman might understand a woman's thoughts, but could she know of a man's ideas?'

"He stopped, frowning, because having come to this old man for sage advice in his dire need, he was put off with talk of silly women. But the old councillor said, 'There is that in woman which soothes a man's soul, knows his thoughts without their reason, but drowns the thoughts and reasons in her soft replies; a power within she herself will never understand, a power greater than the earth, and greater than the sea, to lull troubles, to rest with croonings and whispered words—more than a man can tell.'

"The King strode up and down, swung his cloak about, stood still, tapped on the floor with

his foot, and paced again ; pondered, looked at the old lord sharply, looked away and thought, then turned to him.

"'I would I knew such a woman,' he said.

"'Such a one might be found,' said that cunning old lord.

"'Shall be found,' said the King, warming to the idea.

"'Berries of this sort do not grow on every tree,' replied the councillor.

"'If there be a maid to answer the purpose in this country or for leagues around, or across the seas or over mountains, I will have her found and brought to me,' the King said, 'and here I will build her a nest of gold.'

"'Eagles may not mate with thrushes,' said the old lord.

"'Thrush or no thrush," said the King, 'am I ruler of my kingdom, am I guardian of my own heart? Find me the maid, and he who speaks of thrushes had best beware of the eagle.'

"Now in his heart the old lord, the wise councillor, rejoiced and was very glad, for there was just such a girl, of royal blood, of beauty extraordinary, sweet in her mind, gentle she was and kind, of great estate and high degree, while

of her tenderness and sweet pity all spoke in her country—so she was truly named Violette.

"After a while King Richard said, in the height of his pride—

"'You know of such a maid, old man, so much I can see.'

"The councillor bowed low.

"'Her name is Violette,' he said.

"'Then will I send presents of gold and presents of silver, and jewels, and boxes of sweet raiment, and caskets, and fair painted books, and I will tell her to make a journey to see me in my city in the midst of my people, giving commands and ordering justice, seated on my throne with my soldiers about me, so that she may see to what high place she is called. And she shall lodge with thee and thy dame, and be made welcome.'

"The old lord held up his hands. 'Rather should a man, sire, go to a woman, even though he be a king, and mighty, and woo her; for in the state of love there be no kings and queens, no high or low—but all are equal.'

"To this Richard replied, 'Let this message I give thee be taken:—Violette, the King sends his fair welcome to thee, and bids thee come to this city to see the King rule over all, and if it be that

thou art found pleasant to the King's eye, so shall he choose thee to set thee up beside him on his left hand, to be his joy and his playmate and consolation.'

"The messenger and the heralds and the company that were to bear this message to the Princess, prepared themselves. They were all clothed in violet and purple and silver, the trappings of the horses were of green and purple, and these were covered with housings of purple and silver. Ten knights, with ten men to each knight, went, and three hundred archers in the King's colours, having a ribbon of violet tied on their right arms. Ten ladies went riding on palfreys all bedecked with violet and silver—and a great chest of raiment and a great chest of gold and silver ornaments, with caskets of enamel and books of romances curiously painted; brooches of jewels quaintly contrived, and rings wonderfully wrought.

"The company passed through the kingdom, and having travelled a dark and forbidding wood, they came to the castle where the Princess lived.

"Now when the King of that place heard all the trumpets and saw the violet pavilions pitched about the walls, and saw the company of people dressed in violet and purple, silver and gold, he sent to

know what they might desire—and was told that the herald and ambassadors of King Richard desired to have audience of the Princess Violette.

"The next day she came to them with her ladies, down through the town to the meadow, where all the company stood assembled.

"They spread a purple cloth for her, on which violets were embroidered and real violets were strewn, and the herald, after a blast upon the silver trumpets, read the King's message. After which ten knights knelt to her each with a golden tray in his hands on which were the smaller gifts, embedded in masses of sweet-smelling violets.

"The Princess came forward, her face pale, her eyes deep-set like dark pools of water, and soft like velvet, and sad.

"Taking a bunch of violets from a tray she said, 'This will I take of the King's gifts, and when he has come to seek me as a man to a woman, then will I give him my answer.'

"With this speech she left them and the company went their ways in shame and mortification, and the herald told the words of the Princess to the King.

"Richard started from his throne in wrath and turned upon the old lord who had caused him to be thus humbled in the sight of all his people; his

anger knew no bounds and left the old man white and trembling.

"'Let every violet in the length and breadth of this kingdom be utterly destroyed,' cried the King, 'let them be rooted up and vanish from this land, torn from the ground and piled in heaps and burned, so that the memory of this chit shall be but burning heaps of these weeds.'

"So saying he went from the Throne Room to his chamber, saying that he would see no man.

"Without delay the people went to do his bidding; with knives and daggers and sticks and spades they rooted up and utterly destroyed all the violet plants that could be found, so that by evening the soft glow of bonfires pricked out of the darkness, and thin columns of smoke from the burning plants rose in the air.

"That night under a beech-tree in the dim forest the Fairy of the Princess met the Fairy of the Violets among the bracken and they held grave consultation. The Violet Fairy crouched in her green and purple dress at the foot of the beech, and the Princess's Fairy leaned back against the tree. After a while the Violet Fairy put her mouth to the earth and whispered.

"The city of King Richard lay bathed in the

moonlight, shadows lay across the market-place and houses showed white where the moon looked at them.

"The King was in his bedchamber awake, tossing in his bed, angry.

"On a sudden there was a soft peculiar noise all over the town—the King heard it as he turned and tossed. At first he thought it was only the footfall of a sentry by his door, then he thought it was a wind stirring the leaves of the trees outside—then the smell of violets came through the open window. He rose up and looked out of the window into the market-place below, and gazed and stared.

"The market-place was like a purple field, all covered it was with violets—they grew between the stones, they spread as far as he could see.

"Not trusting to his eyes, Richard put on a houppelande over his shirt and went from his room, out of the castle, to the astonishment of the guard.

"Violets everywhere—choking the beds of flowers in the garden, growing in every street between the stones, filling the air with their perfume so that the King's senses were stupefied by the strong scent.

"Amazed, terrified, he fled through the sleeping town, treading everywhere on the flowers, which gave out a stronger odour as his feet crushed them.

Violets everywhere, growing on the road to the gate, on the banks of the moat, in every corner—filling the air with a scent become awful in intensity.

"They lowered the drawbridge at his command, and he went out into the country. Here all was the same, violets in the fields, by the hedges in the road. The King, holding his heavy garment about him, ran and ran until he came to the dark wood at the edge of which the violets ceased to grow.

"For days he wandered about the wood, going for food to a woodman's hut, learning the lesson of poverty and humility. When his pride came back to him and his mind rebelled, so certainly did he come upon a bank of violets growing and was reminded.

"In this manner after many days his pride left him, and in tattered clothes he wandered to the castle of the Princess."

Round Sir Godfrey and the King many people of the court had gathered, having been in search of the King, and when they came they stayed for the sake of the story, and were unheeded by Peter and Sir Godfrey.

"Near by the castle of the Princess Violette there was a stream, and by this stream King Richard stayed to wash his limbs, and as he came up from the water he saw a number of violets growing by

the bank, these he carefully plucked and brought in his hand to the town.

"He gained admission to the Princess as a poor man who stood in need of charity, for she saw the poor, the maimed and the blind and relieved them by her bounty. When she came to him he knelt at her feet, held out his bunch of violets and said, "I am that proud King," and he knew as he looked at her face that he loved her—she also knew that she loved him. The Princess raised him, drew from her breast a withered bunch of violets—the same she had taken from the tray—and with a silk cord she bound the fresh bunch of violets to them."

"They lived happily ever after?" said King Peter.

"Yes," said Sir Godfrey—"and the violets ceased to grow in that extraordinary way in King's Richard's kingdom, but ever after they were finer than in any other part of the world."

It was the end of the story, and as Sir Godfrey's voice ceased the quiet noises of summer were heard—the lazy splash of the fountain, the twitter of the birds.

Sir Godfrey put his hand into his bosom, drew from it a bunch of withered violets and kissed them, having forgotten his audience.

The King noticed and stretched out his hand.

"You shall be our friend," he said.

THE SEVENTH YEAR

THE COURT PAINTER

TO be a King and to be seven years of age, to have an adoring people, to be accounted half a saint by reason of a laugh in church, to be free of the town and without trammels of State, to be nice to look upon and to be told so—and to believe it—to be all these things and to be unhappy for a moment seems like ingratitude to a most kindly fate.

King Peter lay abed and thought he was unhappy, thought that he had nothing very especial to do that morning, wondered what everybody else was doing. His eyes sought the canopy over his head, and saw St. Peter carved, and wondered if his keys were heavy, turned to his counterpane of green and gold, raised up one knee in bed and made a hill, raised up the other knee and made a valley, plumped them both down with such a noise that Le Haze de Brabant woke.

Le Haze was a noble youth who slept at the foot of the King's bed.

"I am about to rise," said the King.

Le Haze stifled a yawn, got up, opened the lower shutters and the windows, and let in the cool morning air. Peter was up sitting on the edge of the bed swinging his legs.

"I will have no ceremony to-day," he said; "I will get up and dress and go out without all the usual to do."

He was in his shirt, a quaint little figure.

Suddenly he laughed, got down from the bed and minced about the room, imitating the grave gentleman who assisted him to robe in the mornings.

"His Majesty's hose." He carried them in a mock pompous way and placed them before Le Haze, who sat upon a window-seat, and so with all his clothes.

Then the more serious business of washing. Le Haze brought a silver basin of water and two soft napkins. Peter doffed his shirt and stood shaking his curls and laughing—a pretty figure with his rounded limbs and straight back, his sturdy legs and well-poised head, all promising strength. Then he took a napkin and doused it in the basin, and rubbed himself soundly, laughing and chattering the while, lifting his arms to see the

muscles play, stamping his feet to warm himself. After this he dried himself and dressed—a quick, easy business, not over well done, but he would have none of Le Haze and his attentions, preferring to button his own buttons and tie up his hose.

"Remember," he said at the door, "that we would be left alone." He made a grimace and ran down the stairs quickly.

Peter had made up his mind to search for his fascinating friend, the second upper gardener. Now this good man was excellent enough to cheer the most doleful. He was full of very satisfying silences, and he had as relish to these silences three stories, which he always told in the same voice, with the same gestures, with the same result to himself—a great burst of hearty laughter, after which he subsided in his silence, made fruitful by certain nods and grimaces, upliftings of the finger or eloquent sweeps of the hand. They were the most witty stories in the world to the gardener, and so far as he was concerned they were the only stories in the world. On such occasions as these, when the King dropped his state for a while, and caused himself to be known as Peter, a small boy, with a heavy penalty to all who did not treat him as such,

the gardener was one of the first people he sought. Next was Yves the Court Painter, and after him Hugh of the Bridge.

The gardener saw the King coming down a pathway, wearing a red cap, which was a sign that he had doffed royalty and donned good fellowship. He allowed Peter to approach him, and went on weeding a bed of beets, pulled his lock as the King stopped in front of him, and went on working—for a while neither of them spoke. The gardener knew what was expected of him, and smiled to himself as he stooped over his task.

At length he spoke. "Have I ever told 'e the tale of Simon and the Gurt Bogey, little master?"

Peter shook his head.

"Haw! Haw! 'tis a rare tellin' is the tale of Simon—that it do be."

He stood up and wiped his forehead with his arm, his honest eyes twinkling with merriment.

"This Simon," he began, "was a old man, and be Our Lady's cloak, he were a boastful old fellow enough. They youths and the maids did sit agape to hear old Simon tell how he'd fought in this and that gurt battle, and how 'twas he killed so many o' these men, and all with a gurt sword he had hung up in his cottage."

"How big was the sword?" asked the King; he knew he was expected to make this question.

"'Twas so big as from here to ground," the gardener replied, holding his hand about a foot above his head.

"Once in a while some boy, like it might be the miller's son, or some such, would ask if he might take down the sword to hold it in his hand, but old Simon would get in such a rage and confusion at this and put the lad to shame avore all company.

"One day three lads as were called Robert, and Richard, and John—Robert's dead now, other two be aloive—they up and said to old Simon, as he wouldn't dare, for all his tales, to walk through churchyard on a dark night. Well, avore all company old Simon said as he wasn't afeared a' no such thing as dark night nor churchyards, and he would go through that very night and meet Richard, and Robert—the one I told 'e was dead now—and John at other side o' church after he had walked through the yard. Now the church were in a dark place, with trees on most every side of it, and yard wern't nothin' but the field about church, with a corpse gate to one end and a way made to door o' church, and round and out

into a little road. That night there wern't a moon, and old Simon he took down his sword in his hand and walked away out o' village to yard. No one had ever see'd the sword out of its place avore, and folk was powerful interested. Richard and Robert—God rest his soul—and John was waiting in road, not overpleased wi' the dark night, and listening for old Simon to walk through yard and have done.

"Suddenly they heard a yell by the church, and old Simon came running along across the grass yelling like a pig in water.

"Richard, and poor Robert, and John they took to heels away up the road to the village, Simon calling after them. All vour of 'em stumbling about in dark and frightened something awful. All the folk was waiting to hear about Simon, and when they see Simon, and Richard, and Robert, and John yelling and running they all rushed indoors and slammed to the doors in case of bogies. Well, 'twas Richard's mother let 'em all in after a time, and folk took heart and came out and round the door to hear the news. Simon, he says, 'Oh, Lord forgive me,' he says, 'for a braggart and a silly old man,' he says;—'when I got past corpse gate so bold as everything, I walked up path to

door o' church, when oh! out came a gurt bogey wi' hot breath and gurt horns twice so long as your arms sticking out atop, and a most awful fiery eye.'

"The gardener pointed significantly below.

"'"'Twas th' old davil himself,' says Simon, 'so I up and yelled and throwed away my sword and run."

Now the gardener began to laugh and slap his thighs and lift his finger to his nose.

"There was a old hermut lived over against church, and next day he came along with old Simon's sword in his hand, only 'twas broke and 'twas but a wooden one—haw! haw!—and the bogey was but the hermut's old cow, chewing grass in t' churchyard."

The gardener bent his body and held his sides, tears came into his eyes, he roared and bellowed and shook with the story, he slapped his knees, he shook his head, and then suddenly became grave and went on with his work.

For the first time in his memory the King was not so amused as usual. It was an April day and beautiful, and the story seemed ill-fitting to the day.

The next story, he could see, was ready to break from the gardener—he knew it well, and felt in no

mood for it. It was the story of the Sad Tragedy of Mistress Dorothy, and very long.

No, it was not laughter he wanted, not tears, but something between the two.

When the gardener came along the row again, and looked to begin "Atte Bruges in Flanders it befell," he saw that the King was gone, that he had stolen away noiselessly over the grass. He looked for a moment, and then turned round to go on with his work.

"'Tis a pity," he said to himself, "for Mistress Dorothy is a powerful sad story."

Peter the King wandered about the garden, and was about to turn back to the castle, when he heard some one singing.

"It is the Court Painter," said Peter, and walked in the direction of the sound.

There was a paved walk which ran along beside a rose garden, backed it was by a wall, and roofed over with red tiles.

In this place the painter was at work on a large fresco, stepping backwards and forwards, tilting his head this way and that.

The King crept up very quietly and watched him. As the painter worked he sang, quite unaware of Peter. He was improvising the song.

"Had I my mind she would be near me.
Proud as the Peacock, swift as the Eagle,
Soft as the Pigeon, sweet as a Dove."

He stepped back, took some fresh colour, and went on—

"Her eyes like the morning,
Like twilight, like evening.
Dark flowers, dew-sprinkled,
Dim houses of Love.
Like pools in the mountains,
Sharp glinting as sword-strokes—
In mine heart wounds are
Needing sweet healing."

All such was new to the King. He stood listening, wondering, as Yves sang on.

"Her hands as leaves moving
Like flowers 'mong leaves blowing—
Had I my mind she should be near me,
Pure as the lily, bright as the daisy,
Rich as the rose, and fair as a tree.

Walks she as willows
Bend in the cool breeze;
Moves she as white clouds
Over the sea;
Sings she like angels
Leaning from heaven.
Had I my mind she should be near me
Always, for ever, standing beside me,
Soft as the pigeon, sweet as the dove."

Peter came closer, making a little noise. Yves started and coloured, then saw the red cap.

"Peter," he said, bowing, "I thought I was alone."

"What were you singing?" asked the King.

"Some would call it a love song."

"What is this love?" asked Peter.

It was a direct question which had no direct answer, so that Yves was at a loss.

"It is a feeling here," he said, tapping his breast with his thumb, his hand holding the brushes, "and here," he said, touching his forehead, "and here," he pointed in a vague way with the parcel of brushes to the surrounding air.

"I do not feel it," said the King, tapping himself also, "and yet I am very fond of things."

"You will feel it some day," Yves said; "then you will understand."

"Explain it, this curious thing."

"A lady, whom you know, whom you meet, whom you like, looks at you on a day and you on her with different eyes than ever before. At this moment the soul stands bare, and looks out of the eyes, its prison windows, and as soul looks to soul, there passes between them some virtue which binds them for ever, so that they become as one."

Peter tried hard to understand.

"You appear anxious of the lady," said he.

"I could kiss the very ground she treads upon," replied Yves.

"Then I hope it is not one of the duchesses. What are you painting?"

"It is called the Feast of Love," said Yves, setting down his palette and brushes. "There is Love, that small boy throned, with a white mantle on him over a scarlet tunic powdered with hearts, and here are his courtiers, lords and ladies."

"Lady," said Peter, "they have all the same face."

"Sire?"

"Ah! now I see. Yves, tell me, is it Lady Alice?"

"It is, Peter."

"Is she the soul staring from somewhere to somewhere?" said he.

"I think so," answered Yves.

"I don't want to talk about love any more," said Peter, "but of painting. How do you do it? I have tried, and"—with a shake of his head—"I cannot; a piece of board, paints you mix for me, your brushes, but it ends in a blur. I can't do trees, can you?"

"I have done trees," said Yves, laughing.

"Then," said Peter, "grass is so hard to make, it either comes out dirty or all one colour—now I see you make all kinds of marks with all sorts of colours and you stroke them a bit and there is grass, and really like—or ought I to say are grass?"

"Is grass," said Yves, quite solemnly.

Peter changed the subject.

"Why are people not like flowers? Flowers come up out of the mud and dirty earth, still they are clean and pretty—but people, some of them,—I can't explain, but if I were to plant a duchess she would come up weeds."

"A certain duchess," said Yves. The King nodded, these two understood one another.

"I must confess," Yves said, "that I am expecting the Lady Alice here to-day, and if she saw you she might be startled at first; do you mind going behind one of the pillars?"

"Now," said Peter, "for I hear her coming."

So he did.

On the green grass, softly, quietly came the Lady Alice, her black hair brushed off her forehead, and bound and twisted with purple ribbons and strings of pearls. White, she wore, all embroidered with flowers and green devices. Her eyes looked as the

King had never before seen them look, like glad dancing seas of happiness. There she stood for a moment, on the grass, the roses and laurels for a background, and then she picked up her skirts and ran to Yves and called to him in a dovelike voice, and kissed him.

"Oh!" said the King involuntarily.

"Oh!" said Lady Alice, "who is there?"

"Me," said Peter, coming from behind the pillar.

"Your Majesty!" Lady Alice exclaimed and curtseyed low.

The King's red cap had fallen off.

"A red cap day," said Yves.

"I do not think I should be here," said Lady Alice, "do you mind, Peter?"

"He is a friend of mine," said Peter, pointing to Yves, "so I don't mind."

"Peter, you dear, may I kiss you?" She felt shy with her love, so different to the Lady Alice the King's companion as he always knew her.

"You can if you want to," said he.

She knelt on one knee and held out her arms—the King, a little puzzled, went to her, but when he looked into her face he saw such happiness, such tender sweetness, he kissed her first.

"Peter," she said, stroking his hair with a trembling hand, "I am so happy."

The King freed himself of her embrace and stood apart from them, not knowing what to say. He looked at them, she kneeling, Yves standing by her side, behind them—just commenced—the painting of the Feast of Love. Then he turned and left them, nor did they try to stay him.

It was not love, nor laughter, nor tears that he wanted—but something else between all these, yet different; he puzzled it out as he went back to the castle. Half-way he turned again, and tried the third person he had for comrade in these moods—Hugh of the Bridge.

Him he found at his place by one of the little gates to the garden outside the porter's room. Hugh was a grand wreck of a man, who had fought with his father in many a hard fight; his face was like a piece of rough quartz, with one eye stuck in it like a turquoise.

As the King approached, Hugh put down the clog he was fashioning for the winter, and knelt on his knee, bending stiffly.

"Hugh," said Peter, "I would fight with you."

Not a smile or a suspicion of any levity showed on Hugh's face, but he with great solemnity pro-

duced a tiny sword for the King, with a shield, and for himself his own old sword and buckler.

They fought, after a manner, for a time, until the King became exhausted, Hugh guiding his strokes and receiving them on his shield with the utmost gravity. The King stopped, panting for breath, flushed; happy he had found some answer to his need, some meat for his mood.

As he went his ways to the castle, hungry for food, his eye glistened and his jaw set. It was not love, nor laughter, nor tears that he wanted, but some help to the small stirrings of ambition, the first cries of his father's fathers inside him, and from his exercise and his contact with fine rough Hugh—the arch-type of soldier—he came to his chamber satisfied.

So the King waxed in years and in knowledge, and grew fair and straight, with all the naughtiness of a growing boy, and all the tradition of a growing King, and so became tutored to sit in high places after the best manner, which shows that the King is set apart from others and placed above all, in order that he may see the more clearly into the hearts of those in lowly stations.

THE EIGHTH YEAR

THE SCARLET WOMAN

KING PETER came riding through the lanes on a summer morning, past whispering cornfields, to Verwood, the summer palace. Straight was he and fair, eyes like a bird's, quick to notice, taking in the summer sights, pointing with his whip to a hare or to a merry troop of rabbits scuttling up the downs. His nose sniffed the sea breeze and the salt smell borne over the hills by a warm wind. He called to those about him, stern Sir Godfrey of the scarred face, Arthur Morton and his esquire Le Haze de Brabant, and the rest, brimful of enthusiasm he called upon them to notice how the corn ripened, how birds sang, or darted from the hedgerows. Rode hand on hip, the prettiest fellow in green and gold, looking part of the summer.

They came upon Verwood, where it nestled in a little valley, now bathed in rich sunlight, and saw its twin towers rise above the trees, and the smoke from the kitchens curl lazily round them. Then

the King urged Beauty, his white horse, and sped laughing down over the soft grass and so, with his company cantering after him, entered the courtyard.

Peter went to his chamber at once to change his dusty clothes, and to lave his hot face in cool spring water; this over he went to the window and leaned out.

Below him was the courtyard, now full of horses and grooms and barking dogs, opposite him the gateway, to the right the stables, to the left the servants' quarters, straight ahead an upward sweep of turf and then a belt of grand trees, scattered at first, closing after into the wood which covered the hill to the summit, over the other side of which was the sea.

He gave a sigh of content and pleasure, smiling as two white pigeons flew on to the sill of the window and strutted gravely about, waiting to be fed.

Peter remembered his rambles of last year in company with Le Haze to left, straight ahead through the wood, back of the house over to the fields of corn and the stream, to the right—never. This year he was determined to ramble alone, and go by a path he could see from the window leading

to the right. Nothing would satisfy him but to go at once, so he turned to Le Haze, who was now in the room, and gave him his orders.

"Go to the wood house by our stream and wait me there. Have ready some lines and some nets and some food; I will ride later to meet you."

Le Haze, to whom this excursion was a repetition of old and still delightful joys, obeyed at once —it was summer, holiday, and he himself was but eighteen.

Peter had changed into a plain brown tunic of the cote-hardie fashion, with brown hose and plain, unornamented shoes, had buckled on a belt holding a little misericorde dagger, and now, cap in hand, he went out.

Ah! to feel the rich velvet of the turf spring from his feet, to see the daisies' eyes, thousands of them, smiling in the grass, to hear the rustle of the leaves and the piping of the birds, to see the billowy white clouds shift and change in the deep blue sky.

Peter looked at them as he walked, seeing castles and hills, valleys and fairy palaces.

No person had marked his going—no person saw him enter the wood by the little path to the right. From the bright hot sun into the shadow

of the wood left him in a half melancholy, but soon he grew used to the softer light and loved to hear his footsteps on the leaves, to see the sun peer through a place and light a leaf or two of some dwarf oak, making them such a vivid green that the leaves beside them looked glazed and sad. As he walked softly, plucking at the bracken, pushing brambles aside, he saw rabbits rush across the path in front of him, and harmless snakes glide out of his way. At first he mounted, then still in the thickness of the trees began a gentle descent. He came quite suddenly upon a clearing—an open space of grass, across which a tiny stream flowed, bubbling its self-important way in the direction he was taking. He followed by the side of it for company.

At a second clearing he startled a herd of deer browsing on the grass, and when the leader raised his proud, antlered head, and dashed away with his company, crashing through the undergrowth and was lost in the trees, he felt lonely, but still walked on.

The path turned, the trees grew thinner, and he ran, soon to come out of the wood ten yards from a high, white wall, over the top of which he could see a gabled roof. In front of him this house,

on either side the wood branched away, the mass of trees halted on the downs to right and left. Over the house roof a dip in the downs, their grass-covered tops shining and green against the sky. There was a curious rumbling noise, and he knew he was near the sea. Peter had not at first noticed a little door in the wall, but now seeing it he advanced ripe for adventures, and tried it, but it resisted all efforts. Then he moved along by the wall and came to a dense shrubbery with a path leading through it; he took the path, and came blinking into the open.

Such a change of scene looked at first like some trick of magic. He saw a tiny cove shut in on every side but one, here the downs nearly met, allowing but a small opening in some rocks through which the sea lazily lapped. Through this gap he could see the sun dancing, glittering on the dimpled waves.

Trees came down nearly to the water's edge, met turf, and turf met white, white sand, above looked down the shaven lawns over the belt of rich green foliage. The water in the cove was blue, deeper than the sky, and quiet and shimmering in the sun. On his left a white house with a red roof, in front of it a green sward, stopped by a low red wall.

The King stared at everything, his heart beating hard, his mouth a little open, stared, but did not take in all the surroundings at once.

Now he saw more clearly. Sitting on an oriental carpet spread upon the sand, was a woman. She was clothed entirely in scarlet, scarlet which shone in the sun, giving a key to all the vivid colours of the picture. Scarlet of such a peculiar beauty that it seemed to have a sense peculiar to itself.

Once he had seen the woman sitting there, the King saw nothing else. She had been hidden from him by a corner of the low wall, but now as he stepped forward, she came into his vision and caused him to stop, hesitating, frightened, in front of her.

The King did not know it, but he was looking on the most subtle woman of his day, the most curious woman in many leagues.

She had in her face a strange sense of being aloof, yet very near, like a vision. Her face was as the face of a Madonna painted by an evil man, his soul covering hers with a film, modesty and virtue shining through vice and passion—yet mingled, so that the face evaded any such definite suggestion. Her forehead was bare, and her hair wonderfully dressed. She had a smile of such peculiar subtlety

that it was the permanent expression of her face, and yet she did not actually smile—this was the most abiding impression that one could carry away. Her eyes seemed clear, yet to look into them was to look into sudden deep waters, and draw back afraid; she hid as the sea hid, sleeping undreamed-of things.

Yet so curious a face was but the true mirror of a very complex mind, every thought and emotion passed like a film across her countenance—as one may look on a day into the sea and there perceive in the clear water little ripples, mysterious shadows and movings—the surface may show calm and may change, but the deeps never reveal their secret.

It was as if she were surrounded by her soul, instead of enveloping it. Languor of body she had, deadly sweet, yet sometimes it seemed sweetly pure; her flesh, which one must notice, sometimes like fruit warmed by the sun, scented, warm, ripe—sometimes like marble or sea-smoothed pebble, cold and unresponsive.

This the King saw unknowingly, and feared, and did not fear.

The woman's personality was so powerful that she obliterated her surroundings altogether, in any

place where she was ; she was the centre and head of it, the rest fell away from her in misty forms.

They stared at one another for some seconds—then she spoke.

"What do you want, boy ?" she said.

Peter was fingering his misericorde, pulling the little dagger half out of its sheath ; it came to him at first to preserve himself against something that he could feel, yet could not understand.

Then he said "Are you a witch ?" and having so spoken he felt no more fear, for it was but the tension of the picture which before held him spell-bound.

The lady leaned forward, and her eyes melted into two dark spots, her lips parted over her white teeth.

"A witch !" she said, then laughed so low and pleasantly, that Peter gained confidence. "Who are you, boy ?"

Then it seemed to Peter that he did not know who he was, for to be a king in the presence of this beautiful woman seemed impossible, so he hung his head for a moment and said "Peter."

She looked at him curiously, then lifted up her eyebrows.

"I pray you be seated, King Peter."

There was that of tenderness in her voice which drew him to her, and he sat down a little space from her and looked at her in his grave way. "Are you really a witch?" he asked.

"No, funny Peter," she said, "but men call me the Scarlet Woman." Her voice was hard, but she was looking at him with an amused smile on her face.

The King suddenly felt bolder and smiled back, then seeing a lute by her, he said, "Sing," and leaned back to listen.

She picked up the lute and searched her mind for some song to suit this queer boy, struck a note or two and sang—

"Had I a cloak unto my mind
Scarlet 'twould be, y' merveil lined;
Would many a lover prove unkind
If I were clad in red?
And it should reach unto my toes,
For every sage man rightly knows
A long cloak hideth shabby clothes,
As smiles an aching head.

"There, oh King! and there, my most delightful child."

Peter lay on his back, sifting sand through his fingers, but wished he were at home, so queer it

seemed and quaint, and she looked at him and felt long-buried wishes stir within their graves, till mother-glances crept into her eyes and lingered there, feeling ashamed at first to take the place of other very different thoughts.

Then Peter made his shy advances for her friendship, talked to her carefully to probe her, as a child does, so sensitive to the true heart, so shy of confidences to the wrong person.

When he found that she was all he hoped, he prattled on, and she felt moved as never before, a weight lifting from her heart.

The King was hungry and tired; he leaned upon his elbow and looked at her to say so.

So the Scarlet Woman was conquered, and she held out her arms, saying, "Boy Peter," in a winsome tone her lips hardly knew. And her heart said "Cold, cold," and the buried desires in her heart said "We are lonely, we are lonely," and for her the earth stood still and the sun darkened, and the sea became silent; so did her soul yearn for his boy love, and leaned to him out of her eyes.

He not knowing her heart came, he knew not why, but in him was moving some strange thing—a desire for a mother, it was—a longing for the big love he had never known.

And when he came and sat curled in the curve of her arm and looked into her eyes silent and timid, she felt a dart go roughly down into her soul and knew it battered and soiled, saw in those clear eyes reflected a woman throned on vice and clothed in hot passions, but over her head a tiny jewel, the pale dim light of better memories—and this pale light was all the child's eyes saw.

He looked at her, as if to measure her heart, then with a soft movement he nestled closer to her, saying, "I love you, for you are good."

The words burnt red hot into her brain. Good! she—whose daring infamies were whispered over half the country. She, good, sitting like any siren on a sea-girt isle! Good, when this very place held the ghosts of passion-ridden faces, faces which seemed to peer at her from every side! All her old lovers seemed to be near her, round her, sneering with melting eyes, with hands outstretched to touch the boy she guarded in her arms.

She leaned over him, and cried, "I can't explain, dear baby love; but I'm not nice, not fit to have you clinging to my side. I have forfeited all that love."

Then she wept piteously, and cried and wept like any crazy thing, and he, half frightened at her

words, came closer still and said child words of comfort in her ear, and cried himself in sympathy, not knowing why he cried, and so she quietened and stopped her moan. So the tears quenched old fires, and her face shone with a new light, and smiling at the boy through her tears her eyes were clear of those troubled depths, and shone cleanly and purely.

She ran from him, bidding him wait awhile, and went into her house, where by a window Peter saw her in earnest talk with an old woman, resulting presently in a deaf old thing appearing with some fruit and cakes.

Then the scarlet woman came back to him in a blue dress, quite plain, and her hair without jewels, and her face wonderful for its happiness, for its veil of happiness through which sorrow shone.

She drew at his great wish some fancy picture of her life, but ever stopped upon the brink of truth and faltered. Then even through her mother mood the longing aching to speak came to her, and she told him.

Told him of her mother of rare beauty, of her weak father, of the people who came to the place, poets and storytellers, and lewd philosophers, and

evil men. How she met a knight in the wood, and after many meetings he told her that he loved her, and she was glad. Then how her mother died and the confusion; how her father was drunk when she died, and was stabbed by one Nicholas de Brent.

"That devil," she cried, forgetting the boy, "Oh, that devil!"

Then the knight came and saw her in this company, and saw the men packing what riches they could take away—how he drove them out.

Then, as if the scene were ever present with her, she said, "I almost hated him, because he spoke evil of my mother, little thinking that I heard; then waiting for all the men to go, I heard de Brent tell him a lie against me—and he came here, out on to the sand where I waited for him, and asked me if the story were true. Pride steeled my heart, and I told him if he thought such things of me, they might be true—so he turned and left me, but I sprang at him and tore at his face with my hands like any animal."

The King was listening, knowing in some God-given way that he must not speak though he did not understand.

"He left me, and I made hell here, and bade the

men stay,—Nicholas de Brent saw to that, and I made such hell that all the devils in the world seemed to scent it out, and came to scorch—God! how I hoped that he would come some day back to me that I might make him feel as once he made me feel, for I loved and hated him at once—but he has never come."

As she spoke she looked up and saw three men on the high down looking about, and knew that they were searching for the King.

She gathered him up in her arms and kissed him savagely, with a hunger for such kisses, then rose and took him by the hand and led him by a near way to the edge of the wood near by Verwood—and so left him and turned quickly into the shadow of the trees.

Peter the King said no word, but wondered much in his heart, and took no notice of the fuss of search parties and of anxious knights and pale ladies, saying that he had a mind to wander—so wandered.

It was late afternoon, and the household was restrained after this wilfulness of the King's, but he noticed that Sir Godfrey and others talked earnestly together in whispers.

Peter lay awake that night thinking of his strange adventure, and wanting the explanation of it, so that

while his heart ached for the Scarlet Woman, his mind could not follow his heart by reason of his youth.

He lay awake, feeling uneasy for her, as if danger threatened her—for he had not been able to keep the story of his adventure to himself, and he had noticed that the company had taken it ill.

He heard men and horses moving in the court-yard below.

Quickly he rose and went to the window.

The moon was on the wane and gave little light, but in the dim shadows of the yard he could see a shine on armour, and heard some one say "The Witch!" and Sir Godfrey say "Hush, man!"

As he watched, a small company of about five men, he guessed, rode out into the darkness. He ran to Le Haze, who was sound asleep, and roused him.

"Get up, get up, Le Haze, and dress you quickly!"

As Le Haze rose blinking owlishly, Peter confided in him all his story—

"And they mean to hurt her, I am certain," he cried, as he tugged on his clothes, "but we will rescue her because I love her."

The two boys ran out, by chance unseen by any

of the guard, and panted up the slope to the near way of which Peter knew. But in the darkness he forgot the way, and they stumbled into the wood hand in hand. Peter seemed to know the right direction, and urged Le Haze on.

They came to the first clearing by the stream; to the second clearing, and then to the wall.

Suddenly in front of them a tongue of flame shot up into the darkness, then another and another, and sparks of fire flew by on the wind.

Peter hurried Le Haze through the path in the shrubbery, and they came out by the little cove.

What a strange sight they saw there! A fire of wood was burning on the beach, the flames licked by the wind, twisting and turning—with their backs to the two boys four men—they knew them.

The fire made a hole of light in the darkness, and made all else out of its range quite invisible. The red light reflected into the water as it flared and died down.

A man was hammering on the door of the house —that was all Le Haze and Peter heard, the knocking, the faint murmur of the sea, and the crackling of the dry wood.

A voice from behind the door said, "Who is there knocking at this hour?"

And the man at the door said, "Friends to the King."

Peter kept Le Haze back, dragging at his arm.

"What do the King's friends need?" asked the voice, and the man at the door said, "The King's good."

The door was opened, and at that moment the fire caught hold of the wood and burnt fiercely, so that the Scarlet Woman was lit by the fire and thrown sharply in relief against the black hole of the doorway. She looked so beautiful and so strange, that the man at the door drew back.

"What do you wish of me at this hour?" she said.

The man at the door stepped into the light; it was Sir Godfrey.

"We wish the King's person to be protected, to be cleansed of this spell you have cast upon him, and to do justice."

"What have I done?" she said, looking at him, and putting her hand upon the lintel post to steady herself.

"God knows what you have done to him," said Sir Godfrey, "but I know of others whom you have overlooked with your witch's eye and spoiled their lives. We brand women like you, whether

they ply their trade in houses or the market-place."

His voice was low and bitter, the fire brought out the scar upon his cheek vividly.

He seized her by the arm and began to drag her to the fire, when the King ran forward into the circle of light.

It was as if an angel had stepped in among them, so unexpected, so sudden it was.

The men's faces were taut and angry, and awful in the firelight—one held an iron red hot, one end in the fire. The superstition of them overmastered their kindly natures — they came to brand this notorious woman whom they thought had bewitched the King.

Sir Godfrey recovered himself and thrust the King aside—he had old scores besides this to pay —and called to Arthur Morton with the iron.

The Scarlet Woman looked only at the King.

As Arthur Morton took the iron out of the fire, the King called, "Put away that evil thing, you cowards. I love this lady in my heart, and he who touches her to do her harm is no friend to the King."

He went over to her and took her hand, which was stone cold, and she looked down at him.

Whether it was the firelight or the excitement of the onlookers, it is not possible to tell, but as the woman bent and the King looked up—all thought of the miraculous Madonna in the abbey church—the pose was the same, and the light was very similar, because the statue in the church was lit from below by a mass of candles.

The sea moaned and the fire crackled—there was no other sound.

Then Sir Godfrey knelt down on the sand and asked for the King's pardon, looking at the woman, and the King also looked at her, saying, "It is her pardon you must ask."

"Mary," said Sir Godfrey, but could say no more—the fire showed the scar on his face, crimson against his pallor.

She held out her hand to him, one arm still about the boy; he kissed it, and the others did so in turn.

Then she kissed the King and went into the house.

Sir Godfrey rose to follow her, and went to the door of the house, but dared not enter it; but the King went up behind him and opened the latch, and there they saw the Scarlet Woman leaning against the door, sobbing silently. By some instinct the boy left them, and closed the door.

The group of men about the fire stood silent, the King stood a little apart from them watching the door. Presently this opened, and Sir Godfrey came out—with him the Scarlet Woman in a great cloak.

Without a word the horses were brought up, and a woman's palfrey also. So, the King riding on the saddle in front of Sir Godfrey, they rode through the forest, home.

As they neared Verwood, within a pace or two, Sir Godfrey put his hand into his bosom and drew out a bunch of withered violets, kissed them, and threw them away. The King saw this.

"I may get fresh violets anon," said Sir Godfrey, looking at the woman. Then they rode into the courtyard.

THE NINTH YEAR

THE COWARD

NEVER was King so free of cares of State as the ruler of the Little Kingdom; a certain amount of letters and law, a certain schooling in the use of the sword, exercises in tilting, flying a hawk, and some other kingly pursuits were his occupation; all his leisure he was free to roam the town and the country alone, for the people loved him in their heart-whole way, so that he was as safe abroad as at home.

As he walked in the streets women regarded him with a motherly eye, maidens with a sisterly affection, little girls with sentimental adoration, and men with pleasure at his manly bearing.

It fell in April that Peter the King walked through the market-place towards the bridge.

It was a fine healthy day with an east wind blowing, so that the King's cloak blew about him as he stood at the foot of the street hesitating, the greyhound by his side nosing the air.

Peter walked slowly along, looking at the

passers-by, who, noticing the red cap which he always wore when he desired to be free from formalities, forbore to salute him with more than a cheerful glance and a lifted cap.

He came to the East Gate, the Anthony Gate, and so through the archway on to the bridge.

The wind whistled merrily over the water, setting up little tossing waves which splashed and lapped at the buttresses of the bridge, sang merrily through the rigging of a vessel at anchor, and sent dust curling away in circular patterns,—a merry wind.

The bridge boasted two towers, a chapel in the middle, and in the wide angle on the left a little stone house. This house was part of the actual bridge, two walls being the sides of the angle, a third the side of the gate, the fourth a curved wall which met the angle and left a space for a low door. The upper part overhung the river on one side and the roadway in front; the roof was of red tiles.

A very different whistling to the wind's struck the King's ears as he stood there wondering where to go; it came from this house out of the open window. It was a very suggestive whistle, with something of melancholy in it; the tune, if it was

one, halted and stopped, began again and ceased, almost in the manner of a conversation.

Peter's curiosity was aroused, and he went to the window and peered in.

On a low wooden bench inside a man was seated, working. He wore a leathern apron, and held between his knees a piece of wood which he was fashioning with a knife.

Peter now saw why the whistling stopped and went on.

Every now and again the man would take the piece of wood in his hands, put his knife between his teeth, and hold the wood away from him an arm's length to examine it critically. Then he would start cutting away at it again, and the melancholy whistle began afresh.

As the King's eyes grew accustomed to the light he could see on a shelf near by the man's hand a number of little figures cut in wood, some brightly coloured, others partly painted, a few shining in places with gold leaf, and a few bare of any ornament. With great interest he watched the making of this figure, never stirring so that he might not distract the attention of the carver.

He watched the wood grow from a featureless lump to a rough hewn figure, from that, with extra-

ordinary rapidity, to a recognizable affair with head and shoulders. His interest at length betrayed his presence, for when the carver cut an unusually large piece away, Peter gave vent to "Ah!"

The man looked up and smiled, and the smile was so beautiful that it won Peter's heart at once.

He saw that the carver was a middle-aged man, with very blue eyes. His face had a peculiar look of pain, which was not wholly dispersed by his smile.

"May I come in?" said Peter.

"I shall be honoured, sire," replied the carver, "the door is on the latch."

Peter went round to the door, lifted the latch, and entered.

The carver, with a flutter of pain over his face, rose to greet him—then Peter saw that he was a hunchback. A look of sympathy from the King, a glance of acknowledgment from the carver, and they were friends. The dog went up to the carver and sealed the bond by curling himself at his feet.

"If I may I would watch you at work," said Peter. "Oliver," he said, as an afterthought, remembering to have heard his name.

Proudly enough Oliver produced his figures and displayed them.

"Will you allow me to carve one for you, sire?" said Oliver.

Peter pointed to his red cap. "Peter, if you wish," said the carver.

"There is nothing I could wish better," said Peter, "than that you should carve me a Madonna, and if possible tell me a story while you work."

As he spoke there came to them the sound of two voices; the one said, "Nay, good woman, why should I do this? 'tis not my place; am I not in the King's guard? a very pretty fellow in my livery. Get thee away."

Then an angry voice came: "Drat thee, and sink thee, and mush thee for a Philip Coward!"

The people passed over the bridge, and the wind drowned the sound of their voices.

Peter was eagerly listening, the carver watched him, glad of such bright company.

The casement window behind blew open with a gust of wind, and Oliver rose to fasten it. Peter saw that he would be hurt by any offer of help, and he noticed that Oliver seemed to make a friend of the wind, talking to it as he closed the window.

"Fie, rude fellow," he said, "to blow upon a King and a poor fellow at their chat. Rough

fellow, go, blow your way into the town and cast dust into children's eyes, there's game enough for you. . . . 'Tis a funny, rare thing, this wind," he said, returning painfully to his seat, "to lie here of a night and hear it talking to the water, secrets no doubt, to hear it moan about the harbour bar, to hear it rattle at the door, and push the window fastening—a rare thing."

Peter nodded.

"'Twill blow on you in your bed as on me in mine," said Oliver. "Lord! some nights to hear it scream under the archway there, and make the great doors creak and groan."

He took a fresh piece of wood and began to cut.

"What did that mean—Philip Coward?" asked Peter.

"Don't thee know the tale of Philip Coward?" said Oliver, chipping away. "I will tell thee that, and welcome."

"Nothing could please me better," said Peter, and so settled himself to listen.

Said Oliver, "A Jew sat in a dungeon awaiting the hour of his execution. He was a tall, fine man, with broad shoulders that seemed to fill the cramped space where he sat. He was thrown into this place by King Philip by reason of many

accusations of acts of sorcery and black magic against him, which men said were directed against the person of the King. He had been there nine days, and was but one day to his end. When they had thrown him into the prison and closed the door upon him, he had noticed a shining beam of light on the wall by the side of the door, which came from an iron-barred window, set high up in the wall. It was midday when they imprisoned him, and he was to be executed at midday on the tenth day from then—so much he knew.

"For nine long days, sustained on bread and water, he had watched the light travel over the wall, and so made himself a sort of sundial to count his last days on earth, scratching with his nails rude marks on the stones to mark the hours.

"The ninth day passed, and on the morning of the tenth he prepared himself for his end; he was a quiet and learned man, who wished no one harm, and certainly none to the King, who was also a quiet, just man, but very timid, being indeed a student more than a warrior."

Outside it had begun to rain, the sky darkened, and the wind dashed the rain against the casements.

"The Jew watched the light creep from the

sixth hour to the seventh; no food was brought to him as usual—to the eighth hour, and still no food. He smiled grimly at himself for thinking so much of his meal, when he would be a dead man in four hours.

"The silence oppressed him; he had so counted on the company of the sound of the gaoler moving in the corridor when he came with his bread and water.

"Now the great quiet seemed to herald some great event. 'They prepare,' he thought, 'for my death.'

"Then at the ninth hour he thought he heard a great noise above him, and shouts; but he knew only many men shouting could penetrate his dungeon, and he put it all down to his heart-beats and his fear of approaching death. This was not any mental fear, but purely the dread of the hurt of body, for they were not often merciful.

"His face was ashen grey, his hands tight clenched, his lips dry, his eyes followed the patch of light on the wall pass the tenth hour, creep towards the eleventh.

"Now he was sure he heard sounds, like thunder, rumbling, and then detached cries. Then something was hurled past his tiny window, and crashed down

by the wall outside, after which the light was cut off from above, and he was plunged in darkness.

"Then he heard a noise nearer. The door at the top of the little stairway which led to his dungeon was opened and shut—a man was slowly coming downstairs.

"The Jew by a supreme effort regained his courage. He felt his eyes ache from hard staring; so closed them to save them for his last look on green fields and blue sky and the sun.

"Steps came slowly down the passage, there was a great rumbling noise overhead, and then he could hear the man outside run to his door, hear him pant as he tried the keys; and then with a crash the door opened and a man half fell into the dungeon.

"At that moment the obstacle which had darkened the window was removed, and a faint grey light suffused the place.

"First the Jew looked at his patch of light—it was two hours after midday—then he turned his attention to the man.

"He was in a corner where no light pierced; he lay, half crouching in the gloom, and his teeth chattered, and his knees knocked together.

"'What ails you?' asked the Jew.

"A low groan came from the corner.

"The Jew went up and pulled the man into the best light.

"It was King Philip.

"The King knelt on the floor and clung to the knees of the Jew, babbling incoherent words, gasping, choking.

"'Peace, man, peace; what ails you?' said the Jew.

"A crash overhead made the King shake and tremble, and choked words came from him.

"'I am afraid,' he said; 'Oh God! I am afraid.'

"'What are they doing above?' said the Jew.

"'Oh God! I am afraid,' cried Philip.

"Bit by bit the Jew got the story from him. The day before, it seemed, as they were preparing a scaffold outside the walls, the guard saw an army approaching far away on the hills. Instantly the bells were sounded, and later a messenger rode up in hot haste to say that a certain number of lords and barons were in revolt, and were about to endeavour to take the town by storm.

"'Last night they came,' said Philip, 'and from the walls I saw them burn three villages, and saw the awful things come into the town that had been

men and women. I saw my brother ride, blood streaming down his face, saw him come up to speak to me and fall dead from his horse. Now they are about the town and I am here. Oh God! I am afraid.'

"'Afraid!' said the Jew. 'How did you manage to come here?'

"'When all were gone to the walls,' said Philip, 'I lied to the knights about me, and said that I had a plan. I would go alone to the wood by Emms, and so ride to our cousin at Gorle and bring him up with his men. They argued with me that I must not do this thing, that I should ride out and give battle, but in the strength of my fear I argued with them and forced them to give way. Now I am here. . . . I crept away and they saw me go over the river, and then it was early morning and not yet light, so that the mist and darkness hid me from them. There is a way hither from the river that none but I know, and by this I came stealthily, so am now in safe hiding.'

"'And what do you fear?' asked the Jew, as one who knew fear for a comrade, as one whose hand had been clammy with the sweat of death.

"'I fear not the fight and the hurt,' said Philip,

now calmer, 'but the idea of death, the agony of doubt, the vague foreboding of the future.'

"'Come with me,' said the Jew, 'and let us face our fate together, if you will. I have died once to-day, and now know no fear. You of your estate must fight, it is the fate of kings, and if we fall, I will be with you beyond the grave, to guide you.'

"'Beyond the grave,' said Philip, 'beyond the grave, when my soul has flitted and my body lies dead, you will be with me—do you believe, do you know, beyond the grave?'

"Then the Jew straightened himself, and placed his hands on the King's shoulders, and said, 'I do know.'

"So after many words the King's reason came back to him, and he agreed to go with the Jew to the armoury by a secret way, to arm them both there, and to go out in plain suits of armour to do their best in the field.

"So you will see," said Oliver, as he picked up a small knife and went on carving, "the Jew was a scholar by birth and instinct, but with a fine courage, and the King was a man of action by birth, and only a scholar by taste, which taste had destroyed his bravery.

"They went secretly into the armoury and found no man there, so that all was favourable to the clothing of themselves in some plain mail.

"Once King Philip was dressed and had a sword in his hand, his courage began to leap and to bound within him, and the Jew, who had now the courage born of desperation, was likewise ready.

"They heard from a youth that a great battering-ram was at work on the walls in one place, doing fearful injury. They passed men mad of their wounds, gone raving in the street, tearing at themselves. They ran through the town to find the best place to fling themselves into the fight, and as they neared one of the gates they found a small company of men and knights ready to ride out.

"'The town was in a desperate plight,' one said, 'but the King was fighting on the walls doing wonderful deeds.'

"'The King?' asked Philip.

"'Yes, indeed,' said the knight who had spoken with him, 'the King himself did not go after all to Gorle, but came up in the middle of a great onslaught and saved the town for a while.'

"Before Philip could ask more of this matter, it was seen that the gate was opened and all dashed out.

"In a moment they were engaged in a terrific encounter with a band of miners protected by bowmen. These they rode over, laying about them with sword and axe. The Jew on a black horse on which he had been mounted, leading all, next to him Philip.

"Such execution did these two do that a number of knights and men left the walls and swelled the company fighting without.

"For the whole day they fought, and had no time to think of death and of their fears, and men called out from the walls to cheer these two unknown knights who fought so well.

"Now the enemy being driven back made one last desperate charge. The archers advanced and winged their arrows and then parted to allow all the knights to rush between them to the attack. Blows rained on steel and rang out, blows crashed on leather and sank with a dull noise; men screamed in high-pitched excitement, calling on knights they knew by their coats, to fight; calling particularly on the great men in plain armour who seemed always to be where blows were thickest.

"From the walls the people watched the fight on the plains and cheered and cried.

"He whom all men thought to be the King, rode

down mounted on a horse, and plunged into the fray. All men called to him, knights surrounded him, some bade him go back, some urged him on.

"As the sun sank, dyeing the sky with crimson lights, the battle ceased—the day was won.

"A few men were fighting single-handed, a few archers sent deadly shafts before they died; but the enemy were flying in disorder, leaving most of their number on the ground.

"So, as the battle ceased, the men were helped from their horses, and some slept where they fell, some called to esquires to loose their armour. Many who had been deadly wounded, but knew it not in the excitement, fell fainting on the earth.

"A group of knights came to where the King was standing, bringing with them the real King and the Jew, still with their vizors down. This was not at all what Philip or the Jew had wished, but it was not now to be prevented.

"'Sire,' said the Constable, 'will you order that these brave knights show us their faces, that we may know them and give them proper welcome?'

"Philip looked at the man who wore his own, the King's, suit of armour and carried his shield painted with his device, and saw that he too kept

his vizor down, and he was afraid and looked at the Jew, who stood towering above all men by his side.

"The man lifted up his hand that they should put up their vizors, and two esquires came forward to assist them to remove their helmets, for their arms were stiff with much fighting.

"A cry of astonishment broke from every one to see the King and the condemned Jew standing side by side.

"At that the other King took off his helmet, and all saw that it was the Queen.

"Philip sprang forward and knelt to her, the tears in his eyes. 'Marguerite,' he said, 'you have tried to save my honour.'

"Then he turned to the company and told them the truth, so that all men marvelled and cried out.

"'And to commemorate this day,' said Philip, 'let all Jews in future have a free day on this day of the year, and let them be feasted by the town.'

"So," said Oliver, "it is so to this very day; and above and beyond that, if a man allows his wife to do his work when he should himself be doing it, then is that man called a 'Philip Coward.'"

The wind whistled round the little house, but the rain was over and the sky was again blue.

Peter the King stood up and collected his thoughts, his mind seeing the picture of Philip his ancestor, and turning on his own thoughts besides.

Then he looked at Oliver and saw him hold out the little wooden Madonna which he had finished, and so took it with great thanks.

In such a manner they parted company, the King to go back to the castle, Oliver to go back to his carving and his friend the wind. . . .

THE TENTH YEAR

THE BAPTISM OF BLOOD

IT was winter, and the skies were dull and grey.

At Verwood, where the King lay, the fires burnt blue-flamed in the hearths, the icy breath of winter dulled the window-panes, the trees stood up bare and gaunt against the sky.

Every morning Peter the King looked from his chamber window, expecting to see the ground carpeted with snow, but none fell, and the clouds failed to fulfil their sullen promise.

There was a suspicion of something in the air, like the hush that precedes a storm; the usual fine crisp sounds of winter were hushed; Nature maintained a grim silence, and it was bitter cold.

As in the spring men wait for the first tender advances of green bud and timorous blade, look out upon a day and behold Nature has clothed herself in tender hues and dear delightful green; so at the end of autumn men also wait to see the mists roll up the valley, and the sea fog hang about the hills, until there comes a day when Nature

stirs and wraps herself in comfortable snow, like the white coverlet of her marriage bed, waiting again to bring forth tender spring.

It was such a time of waiting, and the King, thinking to break the tedium of the days, went down to Verwood, there to prepare a certain merriment to welcome Noel.

A company he had with him, not over great, but just sufficient to his needs. He had Arthur de Brynchesley and Barbara, son and daughter to his Lord Constable; Sir Godfrey de Court also and Lady Mary, his wife, called once the Scarlet Woman; also he had John of Kyme and Percy de Twithorpe, two knights, with Lady Alice and seven other knights, one of them a queer, grim man, Bernard de Chaude, who had a pale face, over which the skin was stretched so tightly that the bones stood out plain and clear. Withal he had a sunken eye, dark but not forbidding, and a great way of cracking a jest without a smile about his lips.

Of course the faithful Le Haze de Brabant was with him.

The nature of the King's merriment was this. Here in Verwood was a quiet monk, Ambrose, who had written in his early days a rhymed affair,

which he called a "Morality." It was a sort of semi-religious play, an allegory of life. This the King wished to be performed by his guests when he returned to the castle, and here they were to rehearse and perfect their several parts.

Arthur de Brynchesley was to play Riches, a fine character, neatly penned by Father Ambrose; he and two other gentlemen were to play in full armour, all gilded, and their part was to persuade Pilgrim, played by Le Haze, that money and lands stood above all other gains. Pride was given to Lady Mary, who accepted the part with great seriousness; Sweet Pitie, Lady Alice took gladly —she it was who helped Pilgrim when he had fallen into the marsh of Idlenesse, which character John of Kyme took. Then Sir Godfrey learnt the words for Companion, Percy de Twithorpe accepted with a smile the part of Wikked Tunge; one lady played Mirthe, another Sweet Speeche. Love, who helped Pilgrim on his way and led him through all temptations to Dethe and so to Heaven, was played by Barbara, the young daughter of the Lord Constable; Dethe himself was taken by the grim Bernard.

For a certain night the King commanded that all should dress in the costumes prepared for them,

and sit together in the upper hall to supper, after which they should recite their pieces.

The secrecy of the ladies—ah, how they tried their dresses on day and night! how they walked in corridors murmuring rhymes!

Then the King found Le Haze one morning sitting in his white habit practising heavenward glances and pious expressions.

The day arrived on the evening of which the trial of the dresses was to take place. Outside it was a little more sulky and leaden than before, a little more forbidding. The cold was bitter, and the chill wind found all the cracks and places that could be to blow cold draughts.

The evening came, and in the upper hall the candles burnt, shedding their soft glow; the fires roared merrily, and the table was laid with goodly provisions.

To this scene of brightness entered the King alone.

In the little room out of this hall a cask of wine and more provisions were placed in case of need.

Peter looked at every preparation with care, and then summoned the serving-men and the pantler and told them all was good. He saw to every

occasion : first, he had ordered that nc
dresses should be given to him, each r
a surprise ; then he had dressed hims
in a short houppelande without skirts,
and gold-embroidered shoes—a com
dress. All the servants were in white
powdered with his badge, a gold gre
cumbent in flames.

Peter took his seat and clapped his h

The door opened and Father Ambrc
a lean monk with a humorous face
shaving-mark on his chin. He bowed,
to the door to announce the charact
Morality.

Pride, Lady Mary, entered first in
dress, sewn with pearls ; she wore a crov
a sword with a silver hilt was in her hand
ful she looked haughtily

Sweet Speeche with a grey dress, and a golden bell in her hand.

Then the men—Arthur de Brynchesley and his two knights in gilt armour, very splendid; and John of Kyme, dressed wonderfully as Idlenesse; then Wikked Tunge in black, and Sir Godfrey de Court in plain armour as Companion.

After these were seated there was a pause, and following this, Love, Lady Barbara, in golden cloth, with blue wings, led in by Le Haze, looking so pious and so proper in his pilgrim's dress, that the company applauded and were vastly impressed.

These all took their places at the table.

Then last of all came grim Bernard as Dethe, his face painted white, his eyes darkened round; about him hung a rusty coat of mail, torn and broken, in his hand a great axe, on his head a wreath of dead leaves. He stood framed in the doorway, looked at them and smiled. It was a grim jest, well played.

So they sat down to food.

When they had finished, and the servants had cleared the table and put the trestles away, the King commanded that the benches be drawn up to the fire, and the hot wine be brought in.

Two men entered, carrying a cauldron of copper,

in which the spiced wine was, put it down by the fire, and retired.

Then the King signed that all should speak their parts.

Sir Godfrey, who spoke the Prologue, rose to commence, when a great noise was heard below, and then they all started up to hear cries and yells, and horses dash into the courtyard.

John of Kyme ran to the window and looked out. As he threw open the window, the noise became clearer from below, and swords clashed on armour, and cries filled the air, cries principally of "Hamstall! a Hamstall!"

In a moment the truth flashed upon them.

Seeing the King was here at rest in Verwood with but few men, John of Hamstall and some of his evil fellows, some banished knights and unruly barons, were about to take the King's person, perhaps to kill them all.

Arthur de Brynchesley took the lead.

"You, Percy, go in your black dress, and get to the town to raise the alarm; they will easily kill our few servants here, and we must have aid. Go, sire," to the King; "in the little room there are the trestles and the benches; it were best that you go in there with the ladies and such of us as are

not in armour. I, with Sir Godfrey and these two, will keep this place as long as we may ; you build some protection in yon room. Bernard will guard you, and John of Kyme and Le Haze."

He sent them into the little room, for they could hear the doors below crashing under the onslaught.

"We fight in the dark," said Arthur, and he seized the candles and plunged them into the wine to put them out; then he and another took the cauldron and sent the wine over the fire. The logs hissed and sent out a cloud of steam, then the fires died out.

They took their places by the door and waited.

Soon they heard the doors below give way, and heard a fight go on in the hall ; a silence, and then men coming as softly as they might up the stairs.

The room was dark and still. The only sounds were the heavy breathing of the men, and the noises of others moving cautiously outside in the passage.

At this moment the clouds lifted, and the full moon shone out and lit patches of the room with brilliant silver light.

Arthur, Sir Godfrey, and the rest hung in the shadows. The light streamed across the floor, and

stopped by the open door which yawned like a great pit.

With a cry, a man leapt into the room, and Arthur ran upon him with his sword and cut him down before he was aware.

Then men rushed in and closed upon the four about the door.

Sir Godfrey had a swinging club, but could not use it, but a chance arrived. He yelled to the other three to give him room, and with a mighty whirl he crashed the awful weapon into the pack. It swung round his head, whistling its death song in the air, and the men fell like wheat before the sickle. These were John of Hamstall's men in leather tunics and but salade helmets, so they fought badly, being ill armed and worse protected, besides being bunched up in the doorway.

As they fell a knight came forward and cut the mad hurtling thing from Sir Godfrey's grasp, and cut a great wound in his hand also.

John of Kyme fell groaning, and one of the two knights fell.

Then Arthur called to those in the inner room that they could hold the door no longer, and with that they rushed across the room from the door, keeping in the dark shadows.

There was a lull in the fight, during which they could hear orders being shouted. This gave them breathing space.

"Keep away from the light," said Arthur, "so they be bound to show in it, and we see them plain. Do you women keep behind the barrier of those things, and you, sire; God give us victory."

It was a queer picture in the room.

Behind the barrier in the shadows Lady Mary, standing by the King, her sword in her hand, the end tipped with silver by the moonlight,—Lady Alice, dagger in hand, by them. Barbara, in her Love's dress, stood a little apart, her nostrils wide, her head up. The other ladies, quiet, crouched on the floor—the bells on the dress of Mirthe tinkling as she moved.

The placid moon riding high in the heavens shed her silver light peacefully into the room, throwing a fantastic copy of the window on to the floor.

Across the outer room the traitors slowly moved, feeling the shadows with their swords for hidden enemies, clutching the hangings as they crept along beside the walls, waiting silent, listening, till bit by bit they reached the other chamber.

A cloud covered the face of the moon, and for a

moment all was dark—then they entered in to do battle.

Sword met sword in the dark contest, anelace and small dagger were pressed into service for close quarters; the men called softly to each other, like night robbers; fearful they were to hit friend, awful lest foe came on them unawares.

Bernard de Chaude with his axe, felt the breath of a man close to him, whispered "King," and felt a hand draw back, then lifted up his axe and smote. There was a horrid crushing, as of some man's skull split with the mighty blow, and a dull coughing sound as the man dropped heavily to the ground.

The cloud passed from the moon's face, and again the room was streaked with the silver light. It lit on the wild figure of Bernard, with his white-painted face, now splashed with blood, his eyes plunged in shadows, looking like Dethe indeed. It lit on Father Ambrose sprawled across the floor, his right arm bent beneath him, his left clutching at his throat, and shone on his eyes turned back, the whites only showing in his death agony.

Then three men, one John de Hamstall, rushed at Bernard, and the others hurled themselves on Arthur, and men sought for and found John of Kyme.

The Baptism of Blood

With a great sword, plucked from a dead man's hand, John of Kyme fought, doing as valiantly as he might in his heavy draperies which clung about him; these, when he had cleared a space with the sword, he tore from him with his left hand, so that he stood naked to the waist, and then using the mass of stuff wrapped about his arm as shield, he struck and struck again.

Again the moon hid her light, and there was a space when men might breathe, during which time the lady who played Sweet Speeche got wild with unearthly fears, and shrieked and laughed, until Lady Alice held her by the waist and stopped her mouth with a crushed pad of silk from her dress.

The light grew clear again and showed a stream of blood, black in the moonlight, reflecting bright lights. It flowed—this thick stream—in a sluggard fashion over the floor, and crawled its way in the darkness.

The room smelt of sweat and blood.

The sounds of heavy laboured breathing, chokings, cursings, and ill-remembered prayers were in the room, with shifting of feet and the clank of armour.

Then Bernard saw the false knights bunch together for a rush upon the King, and met them

with his axe uplifted, the moonlight playing on it as it swung in the air, and losing it as it plunged into the mass of men.

Now the fight was more even, and formed itself into man against man, the air filled with cries and holy names, blasphemies, women's names and battle cries.

The King saw all, his heart beating high, his eyes wide open, his hands holding tight his small dagger.

Arthur de Brynchesley, near by him, lifted his sword high over his head, and carved with a fell swoop clear to the chine, the false Sir John de Hamstall; the blood spurted out and bathed the King in a hot sticky flood, making his hair hang wet into his eyes.

Peter saw blood, felt blood, knew its heavy peculiar smell, and hardly knowing what he did, ran out from behind the barrier of upturned boards and trestles, and into the fray.

In front of him Le Haze, hampered by his pilgrim's habit, the rosary at his waist swinging as he fought, was engaged with a dark knight, one of the Oddynlees, and as he stepped back to guard himself, slipped on the wet blood, which ran now everywhere, and fell twisted up on the floor.

Oddynlees bent over him with a dagger, raising

his arm to kill, when the King rushed in, almost unnoticed,' ran his left hand quickly up to the man's side, felt the armour-joint, and plunged his dagger into the man's armpit, so that he cried out, and fell heavily upon Le Haze, striking aimlessly as he fell.

The sound of horses galloping fell gratefully on the ears of the King and his men, and the false knights, hearing them also, made one last attempt to kill them all or carve their way out of the door, now piled with the bodies of their number.

Lady Mary, putting aside all fear, ran to a window and called out, and would have been killed had not Sir Godfrey saved her with his shield.

"Here! here! to the rescue!" she called.

Then the courtyard filled with armed men and some came pell-mell up the stairs. Servants brought torches, and in a little time the fight was over and the false knights killed.

Into the sconces on the walls the torches were fixed, and now the moon was hid again, their red light flared alone upon the scene.

And what a scene it was!

John of Kyme, his breast cut open, his head gashed, leant by the window, groaning, and calling for aid, and for water.

Father Ambrose lay dead, and the two knights.

The King's Knee.

The King, the boy Peter, all bloody fron
oot, his hair matted with it, his hands crin
t, his face smeared with it.

Behind him, Barbara, in her golden d
ring gone, the other broken—her face w
drawn.

Beside him, Mirthe, weeping; and the la
weet Speeche, faint in the arms of Lady A

Half in shadow, Lady Mary, binding S
rey's hand with a piece of her own torn pe

All remained silent, the King bending
daze, trying to catch the murmurs from
ot knowing that in putting back the poor la
e left a bloody stain upon his face.

The torchlight making a grotesque pictu
ll, casting heavy shadows and strange ligh
he group.

the air the sign of the cross, and fell all huddled, with a grim rattle in his throat.

And on all this, Bernard de Chaude—Dethe—looked down, and showed so grim in his fantastic clothes.

Servants came and set fresh boards and trestles and clean benches in the hall below, having first washed and cleaned it.

A man below, a groom, told how the servants were surprised at their evening meal and slain, most of them where they sat. How the guard was overpowered and killed, and how he was passed by the men for dead, for his leg was broken and he lay in a faint.

So, all fed and drank, and were mostly silent—in this manner they departed to bed.

For a while the moon came out again and shed her silver light upon the scene, searched inquisitively in nooks, and peered in corners ; lit on the pools of blood in the upper room, and shone along the overturned chairs and benches.

Then great heavy clouds covered the sky and hid the moon and the stars—all was plunged in darkness.

The next morning Peter the King awoke out of

a deep sleep and saw the snowflakes for which he had so long waited fly past the window in their mad dance.

He called: "Le Haze! Le Haze! Get up!" and then remembered, so that his face went white and pinched, and he called out.

Instantly the door opened and a new esquire, one Galeran, showed himself in front of a double guard.

Peter called for Lady Mary, and when she came, curiously fresh after the awful night, because her man was safe, he called her to his side and took her hand; so sat for an hour or two without speaking, looking at the pure white snow whirl past the window, his eyes dry, but his heart sunk within him, and his sorrow too deep for speech.

THE ELEVENTH YEAR

CANDIDA PENNY

THE burly men rose as Peter the King came up to them.

They were sitting on the shingle beach to the west of St. Gabriel's Cove, waiting for the mackerel to play.

One by one they bent the knee and kissed the King's hand, and then stood aimlessly for a minute or two, silent.

"Any fish to-day?" asked Peter.

"Couldn't tell, sire," answered William Penny; "like as not might be, and then happen there mightn't."

"You can't tell, sire," Stephen Coddle joined in; "one day the water can't seem to be enough to hold them; next, sea seems to be all water and no fish."

Peter nodded.

"Some days we never see a fish," said Henry Bee.

"Correct," Walter Fellow said.

Then they all sat down.

Stephen Coddle cleared his throat. "'Tisn't as if there wern't no fish," he said, "'cos there be, and in a manner of speaking there ain't, if you please." He felt called upon to keep up the conversation, as the rest sat in a line and solidly regarded the water.

"I hope there may be some this noon," said Peter.

The line of stolid red-brown men stared harder at the water, as if the very power of their eyes would pull the fish to the surface.

"Some days," said Stephen Coddle, "it appears as if a man might spend his days here and never sight a fish; other days he sees such a power of fish he can't catch them. 'Tis the way of here below."

"Correct," said Walter Fellow.

"Well put," said Henry Bee.

"'Tis so on this land and in this water," William Penny said.

Behind them rose low cliffs covered with short grass; on one hand the Cob stood, and on the other a spit of rock ran out, and so between them made a fair cove.

It was May, and the beginning of the mackerel season.

"How is Dame Penny?" asked Peter.

"She's a mother," Stephen Coddle whispered to him. It was Dame Penny's perpetual condition.

Peter turned red.

"Our tenth," said William Penny slowly, looking at his fingers. "Mary, Martha, Anne, and Alice, Stephen, William—after me—Henry, Arthur, Robert, and this one I'm reckoning to call Walter."

"Correct," said Walter Fellow.

Peter noticed that William said ten, counted them by name, and in so doing told a lie—he had eleven children. The eldest daughter he always left out; she was called Candida, after the patron saint of the town. None of the fishermen appeared to notice this.

Candida Penny had always been a mystery to the King, because he had often seen her about on the beach, had spoken to her once and had received such a peculiar look, and no word in answer, that he had taken himself off quickly. He had even heard William Penny speak of her as "the maid," had seen him give her fish—so that he never could understand why she was not counted among his children. That she was his daughter he was certain, since Stephen Coddle had long ago warned him on that point.

"That maid over yon," he had said, "she do be th' eldest daughter to William, but 'tain't thought about, nor spoken much of in this part."

This was when the King was a little boy.

Still anxious to do the exact thing, Stephen Coddle said—

"Your father, sire, God rest his soul, he used to fish along with us, often; and if I may speak for my mates, we likes to see you, as it were the present King, coming along and sitting with us rough and humble folk, as if you were enjoying it."

"To which remark, Stephen, let me add, we will all give our best affections," said William Penny.

"Our best love and affections," said Henry Bee.

"Affections," said Walter Fellow.

"I thank you all," Peter replied, "in that you respect my wish to remain simple, and not always trammelled with royal state. As for affection," he continued, "I love you all."

"And no harm done," said Stephen Coddle, now quite happy, "for as I've often said on this very beach, to think of being a king makes me turn at my food."

"To think of that," said Henry Bee.

"We shall make good friends to you, sire," William Penny said.

Walter Fellow did not speak.

"Mackerel!" cried Henry Bee. "Mackerel! East!"

Up they all jumped, and ran towards the boat, calling to each other as they ran. "See! They are coming in shore! They will be up again in a minute—there they are! Hurry! Hurry!"

Walter Fellow first at the boat, Stephen Coddle last—Peter calling out—everybody running—every one calling out.

The boat off, Stephen left ashore with the rope which joins the end of the net.

The water was still, the fish were not now playing, the men were waiting on their oars, waiting to see the bait rise again—that quick white rush on the top of the water.

Then the fish played; the noise of it—the excitement of it!

It was a great school of fish. The men bent their bodies to the oars and rowed round the fish, while William Penny, the head man among them, cast the net.

They rowed the full semicircle and so to the beach again, all this time Stephen Coddle and

Peter the King hauling in the net hand over hand.

William Penny remained in the boat, while the others jumped out on to the beach and hauled in at their end. Meanwhile Penny pulled round the net, and, holding on to the floating corks, tested the net to see if it was stuck on the bottom among the rocks.

So the men hauled, and the King did his best, and they laid the wet net by them on the beach, until the arms joined together—Stephen and the King walking with net and rope in hand to meet Walter and Henry. Now but a little remained in the water, and as a wave uplifted and broke on the beach they hauled quickly together to pull the fish out.

What a weight it was! and how they pulled and strained, calling to William Penny to help if he might from the boat.

Now the women, hearing their cries, ran down and helped to haul, but still the net lay heavy in the water.

Certain young Pennys came, Alice and Mary and Stephen, with John Bee and Martha Coddle.

At last, with many laughings and much joking, the net came out, with never a break—full of quivering fish.

They turned the fish out of the net on to the beach, high up.

How they palpitated on the beach! How they sent a quivering halo of silver scales about them! They gasped and shook, and made that peculiar hopeless noise of shaking and quaking that dying fish make, like a shower of tiny stones rattling one against another.

They were fine May mackerel, and they took a long time to die.

The fishermen and their wives and children bent over the mass of fish, and made various comments.

The King stood a little apart, looking at the group, not altogether enjoying the sight of the struggling fish.

In a very short time everything was over—the fish in baskets ready for the women to take them to hawk in the town, the boat hauled up with the net back in it, the few remaining fish divided among the fishermen for their supper.

Each man sat as before, but with his half-dozen mackerel beside him, a piece of twine threaded through their gills.

Where the mass of fish had been some sea-gulls hovered, giving harsh cries.

The silent line of men sat waiting for the

mackerel to play again—full of content: the King sat with them.

Full of content; yet as his mind occupied itself again he thought much of Le Haze, the friend and confidant of his youth.

His face grew sad and perplexed as he pondered on the strange wonder of life and the strange puzzle of death.

Try as he would, he could not conjure up a vision of Le Haze; only he saw in his mind a misty face he knew meant Le Haze to him.

It was as if some one had drawn a thick veil over part of his life. He felt very much alone.

As he dreamed in this way, only half conscious of his surroundings, he felt suddenly a strange presence beside him.

It was Candida Penny, standing looking out to sea.

Peter supposed that the men had given her some fish, for she had a string of them in her hand; he had not noticed that they had done this.

She stood there looking with her peculiar eyes—not at the sea, or at the sky, but beyond.

She was a fine girl of about twenty-three, strong, well-knit, carrying herself with unconscious pride; and her face was nearly beautiful, fine-featured, healthy, but not sane.

From her eyes no soul looked out, they were so vacant, so calm. Very light-coloured eyes they were, almost straw-coloured, with small black pupils. They had no expression, no change.

She spoke to no one, and no one looked at her, except Peter ; he gazed covertly at her, half fascinated by her strangeness.

Stephen Coddle noticed this.

After a short time this girl turned quietly away and walked along the beach, passed the few cottages, and up the down on the opposite side to the Cob—walked along a footpath to a small cottage up on these downs, opened the door and went inside. All her movements were followed by Peter.

"She's going up to the lamp," said Stephen Coddle.

"Do tell me about it," said Peter quietly, looking anxiously at William Penny.

"He don't mind, now, do 'e, William ?" asked Stephen.

"Mind what ?" said William Penny, coming out of a day-dream.

For answer Coddle jerked a finger in the direction of the cottage on the downs.

"She's a odd fish, poor girl," said William to the King ; "a queer, poor creature is the maid."

"A good girl, though," said Henry Bee.

William Penny looked sharply at him, then away to sea; he scratched his head—evidently he was confused.

"Ay, William," said Stephen Coddle, "I hold with every word Henry speaks; a good girl in the main."

"'Tisn't as if I had any feeling—now—against the girl," William said slowly; "no, 'tisn't that, as it were. I see what 'e do mean, but by the blessed bones of Saint James, if I could handle the brute——"

His voice choked with sudden passion, and the veins swelled on his forehead.

"There, man, 'tis all over, in a manner of speaking, and put away," Stephen Coddle remarked.

The afternoon was growing into evening, the sun was low.

"Four years ago, come ten days," said Stephen to the King, "this girl was so joyful as a rose, and as good and sound a maid as any here about—I speak the truth, William."

William inclined his head.

"The year Henry's brother, Robert, was come to a watery grave," said Coddle.

"Aye," said Henry Bee, "Robert should a' done

as I told him. 'Robert,' I said, 'don't a go out on such a night,' but he dared, and I never saw him living again."

"The maid," Stephen continued, "took her basket of fish up along to the town, same as the other girls; after they had sold the fish they got junketing. You know what maids do be," he said to Peter.

Peter answered with a nod—he didn't know, but he felt he ought to nod.

"A pedlar," Stephen said.

"May his body rot in a desolate place," said William.

"Hush, man, 'tis not seemly," said Henry Bee.

"'Tisn't right," said Walter Fellow.

"A pedlar, he——well, as one might say, him and the maid they ran away together, and forgot to call at the church in passing."

"May the Church forget him," said William Penny.

"Look 'e," Henry said, "the young master don't require any of your hard words; 'tis all over, as you might say. Thee must be merciful, William."

"Do 'e call back the time, William," said Stephen, "when you and I went to the town and asked about for news of the maid when she did not come home with the other maids; what did thee say then?"

"Aye," said William, "I do call to mind."

"Then do 'e bide by it, William, and forgive. Like as not the man is mortal bad to think on't and is powerful handy to his prayers."

The light was dying out of the sky, and the sea moaned on the beach.

"'Twas a matter of a year after that," Coddle went on, "that the maid come back. Walter saw her first, didn't 'e, Walter?"

"Aye."

"And Walter he come running to me. I was out at the back cleaning the innards of a pig—what did that old pig o' mine weigh?" he asked proudly.

"Can't call to mind," said Henry Bee.

"Well, 'tisn't part of the history in a manner of putting it, but 'twas a interesting fact.—Walter, he runned up. 'Stephen,' he said, 'here be Penny's maid.' 'Alone?' said I. 'Aye, she do be,' said he. 'Where be she?' said I. 'In the lane,' said he. 'Have thee spoke with her?' said I. 'Aye,' said he. 'Did her speak fair to thee?' said I. 'No,' said he, 'she never opened her mouth.' With that I ran out with my good woman, and bless me if it wasn't all true."

William Penny turned to the King and spoke—

"When I found my maid gone I was like to some great beast, and that sorrowful, I was all wrong and sad."

"Thee did take on," said Stephen.

"Hold thy gab, man," William said. "After a time, young master, I cooled down and talked with Father John, the holy friar, and he was powerful good to me, aye, he wrastled with the devil in me, and throwed him. After that I thought to make some sort of a place for the poor girl against she came home."

"'Twas a blessing of them above," said Henry Bee.

"Aye," Walter Fellow said.

"I've made her a home," Penny continued, "up yon, where you may see a little wood place on the cliff; 'tis of driftwood, and what not. All my mates here helped. Then we put up a window opening to sea, with a piece of rare good glass in it which Father John got and gave to me. It made a lamp, so to speak."

"Every night," said Stephen Coddle, "Walter—over there—went up and put a fresh candle in a notch and lit it against the maid came home by sea; and the light shone over the back, too, against she came down the lane."

"Everybody gave help with getting the candles," said Walter.

"Aye, lad, but you lit them," said William Penny, "and kept the place clean, and thought the rare thought of the figure."

"What figure?" the King asked.

"Walter, he cut a figure out of a tidy piece of wood, to make a image of the blessed saint called Mary la Magdalene; 'tis a powerful good cutting of wood. You can see her two eyes and her hair so plain as life do be. And we called a blessing on it and the house, with the help of Father John. Then the maid came back."

"Her come back," said Stephen, "so queer, 'twas like a wild creature. Her hair all about, her face so white and so thin, I could almost see through her hands; and her was dumb. Her didn't know a soul about, not me or my good woman, nor William either. He wouldn't speak to her—'twas no wonder, William, I'll admit, Dame Penny being with Arthur—but thee wast bitter against the girl, William."

"The maid seemed to know Walter a bit," said Henry Bee, "so he took her up to the home they'd made, and quite natural like he lit the candles, which were there to light her home, and left her."

"Her never spoke to thee, Walter lad, did her?" asked Stephen.

"Her said 'Walter'," he replied.

The other men looked as surprised as if they had heard this piece of news for the first time, whereas fifty times over they had been carefully through the story.

"Her never said no more words after that, did her?" asked Stephen.

"A year after she said 'Walter' again," he replied.

"There," Stephen said to the King, having dragged these details out of Walter.

"Her eyes?" said the King.

"That do be the most of marvel in the history," said Stephen; "the maid's eyes have got that far away us can't know what it may be for, but us thinks maybe she looks for the pedlar."

"And every night," said Henry Bee, "Walter, here, goes up with a candle, and she lights it and puts it in the notch by the window."

"She don't never say no word," said William Penny, "and if so be as the pedlar does come——"

"William," said Stephen Coddle, "if he does come thee'll bide by thy word, or I'll break thy bones."

...ming suggestion of great
the great sweep of its shape.

Suddenly an eye of light pierced

"She's lit the lamp," said Stephen

"Us had best be moving," Penny.

The King felt dimly oppressed. making everything smooth, everythi masses. The steady eye of light window. Who was Candida watchin

The fishermen had hauled the boat high-water mark, and they now took it and spread it to dry on the beach.

The King thought of Le Haze, a had both tried to find out the stor before. He wanted Le Haze, to tel to him. He knew Galeran, his would come down the lane [illegible]

them in turn, and kissed the King's hand, and wished him "God speed."

He turned and left them, and found, as he expected, Galeran waiting at the end of the lane.

Here he turned again to take a last look for that night on the place, and saw the cottage on the down, standing out black against the sky, with its faithful eye of light shining in the darkness.

Then a figure made its way up the downs to the cottage, and the door opened, and another figure came out to meet the first. The light reflected on the face of Walter Fellow.

Then it seemed that the night grew darker and swallowed them up.

THE TWELFTH YEAR

PARDON YARD

A MAN in tattered and patched tunic lay in a field sunning himself. By his side was a staff and a bundle. He was a merry-looking fellow, thin and tall.

The King chanced upon him as he lay there in the drowsy heat, and crossed the field to see who he might be.

As the King came up, the fellow woke out of his half-sleepy reverie and looked at him intently.

"Hallo, comrade, what's your name?" he asked.

"Peter," the King replied, smiling. "What is yours?"

"Hold on there," the stranger said, lifting himself on one elbow, "my name is my one and only personal, private, and exclusive property—all I have in the world but Samson."

"Samson!" said the King.

For answer the man leant over to his cloak which

lay beside him, pulled it up from the bunch it lay in, and disclosed—a rabbit asleep. The rabbit woke, pricked up his long ears, put them down again, and began to nibble at the grass at once.

"Samson!"—up went the ears again—"Samson, our new friend Peter, fair face, fair hair, prettily dressed, and with evidently a nicely-filled interior."

"Are you hungry?" the King asked.

"Hungry!—my boy—hungry! I am always hungry! Give me capons, and I will tell you of courts; give me junkets, and I will joke for you; possets, and I will roll off poetry; wine, I will discourse of women; but there, blessed bones, you are too young—far too utterly young, youthful, soft-boned, inexperienced, what you will, for any such conversations to interest you. My boy, beware of women—run from them, and they will run after you; flout them, and they will follow you; love them, and they will take all you have and give it to another man—from him that hath all shall be sneaked, snatched, purloined, and stolen; marry them,—ah! I dive into the mysteries of life. Life, my dear delightful boy, is made up of wine and women, dice and prisons, girls, wives, maids, with men as a hopeless, ignorant, finger-twisted, rotten background.—Samson!"

see education has left its mark, i
stamp, seal — what you will, on you
servant."

The King smiled, and sat down
stranger.

"Give this jewel among animals herbs
perform to you."

"I fear I have none about me," said
laughing.

"But, dear boy and most charming co
have in your fat purse the wherewithal
solitary crown will buy for you what ocean
could not buy for most—a private, parti
most captivating performance from the
Samson."

The crown exchanged hands.

Samson, true to his master's words
begged, played with his forefeet on a

in the world? Samson is an animal, and I—merely a beast."

"I admire him immensely," said the King, stroking the soft fur of the rabbit.

"Where do you come from?" the stranger asked.

The King waved his hand about.

"Myself am from everywhere," said the stranger. "The sky is my ceiling, the earth my floor, the sea my bath. Nothing upsets me, nothing disturbs me—nothing, that is, but sore feet and an empty belly. Where I love I lie, where I hate I avoid. For me the sky is always blue."

"The grass green," said the King.

"The women kind."

"The road free."

"Exactly," said the stranger; "you have pinched my philosophy into a bag. I am free of the road. Ho, la! I am as free as a bird."

The sound of a bell ringing mournfully reached to them. It sounded as if the bell was worn by some one moving slowly along.

The stranger jumped up and went to the hedge. The King tiptoed to look over also.

In the lane a cart was passing, drawn by a thin horse, covered with a black pall, on which shone

a silver cross. Two feet stuck out of the end of the cart. By the side of the cart two friars walked, one leading the horse, the other reading in a low tone from a book which he held in his hand.

Both the King and the stranger crossed themselves, and stood bare-headed as the cart passed by.

"Some poor deluded soul going home," the stranger said thoughtfully.

"To Pardon Yard," said the King, looking at the cart as it moved out of sight, lost at a turn of the lane. "Why Pardon Yard?" he asked, turning to the stranger.

"Don't you know the story of Pardon Yard?" he replied—"the remarkable, interesting, humorous, sad, tragic history of Pardon Yard? Blessed be the name of Tom Aquinas—you surprise me!"

They went back together to their old seat, where the rabbit sat peacefully nibbling.

"I've half a mind to tell it to you," said the stranger; "I've more than half a mind. Blessed bones, I will tell it to you."

He spun the crown neatly in the air, caught it deftly between his teeth, and then transferred it to a pouch at his belt.

"In a certain town there was a great monastery, richly endowed. In this monastery a certain monk, one Simon, who was famed far and wide for his paintings. Lord love me, he could put before you on his panels holy Madonnas as sweet, modest, mild-eyed, gentle—what you will—as any in the world, and I have seen a number—egg-faced, square-faced, long-faced, sad, smiling, human, divine, all sorts and sizes, but never one to compare with those by Father Simon. Dying Christs I have seen by the score, but none so pitiful as his; Sebastians by the multitude, but not one so martyr-like as Simon's."

"Saint Sebastian with the arrows?" asked the King.

"Arrows! blessed bones, arrows! he was stuck like a hedgehog with them, and limbs he had like a beautiful youthful wrestler. The ladies came for miles to see the picture, and developed such an alarming devotion to the Saint that—but there, I'm wandering.

"One day, so the tale goes, Father Simon was at work in his cell, singing and talking to himself, when in came an old monk who lived in the next cell, and asked to look at the picture. It was a Madonna surrounded by angels. Father Simon,

with an artist's pride, stepped back from his work and waved an explanatory brush at the picture. The old monk, by name Anthony, looked hard at the painting, and said then to Simon—

"'Dear brother, I wish most humbly to speak to you of a matter that has been long on my mind. To me this Madonna is too human, too beautiful in the manner of flesh for a true and holy picture of our dear and Blessed Lady. I have noticed of late, my beloved brother, that your paintings have begun to get more of the world into them, more of the subtleties of the flesh that corrupts than of the sense of the soul that corrupteth not.'

"Upon this Father Simon spluttered and fumed, and vowed that the reverend gentleman didn't know what he was talking about.

"'Art,' he said, 'and beauty,' he cried, and so forth and so on, until the old monk Anthony left the cell with a sigh.

"Now the Father Prior commanded against a great feast-day, the feast of the dedication of the church, that there should be a rare new piece done to put over the high altar. He called Father Simon to him and propounded his idea, notion, scheme, suggestion, what you will—to the point that he, Father Simon, should paint, portray,

and otherwise produce the story of the betrayal of our most divine Lord, by Judas the arch-traitor. Well and good. It was settled in no time. The Father Prior, his hands meekly folded on his majestic paunch, listened delighted to the dreams and proposals of Father Simon. The picture was begun. Now at this time the devil, who had no particular work, came to Father Simon and lodged in his mind.

"'Away, Satan,' said Simon.

"'Come now, Simon,' said the devil, 'listen to reason; here's this old fool, who knows no more about art than a sheep, advising you this way and that way.'

"'Away, Satan,' said Father Simon, painting hard.

"'Proper pride,' said the devil; 'and why shouldn't you paint beautiful women if you want to; is it wrong?'

"'No,' said Simon to himself, 'it's not wrong.'

"'And Sebastians,' said the devil; 'they bring a host of penitents to you.'

"'They do,' admitted the monk.

"'Beautiful penitents,' urged the devil.

"'Away, Satan," said Father Simon.

"The devil in Simon's mind kept quiet for a while."

"Which was clever of the devil," said the King.

"Which was devilish clever," said the stranger.

"Now in addition to his strictness in matters of art, Father Anthony was very severe in matters of money. He threatened his penitents with all the infernal tortures of hell his mild and holy mind could invent, if ever they strayed from the straight path of fair dealing. One of his penitents, by name Timothy, a merchant, was for ever erring on the side of giving false weight and for ever admitting it, and for ever being treated to lurid pictures of the hell which awaited such evildoers. His conscience in time grew hard, and his mind attuned to these pictures of hell, but for all that he carried a holy fear of Father Anthony about him, and so grew to hate his good priest, and also to withhold the acknowledgment of many of his petty thefts when he went to confession. One day he came upon Father Simon in the town and spoke to him. Then the devil divided himself into two, as the devil can, and sat in the heart of Father Simon and in the heart of Timothy, the merchant. The three grew to be great friends."

"The three?" asked the King.

"Simon, Timothy, and his cloven-footed majesty, the Prince of Darkness and Damnation," the stranger replied.

"So the devil tempted Timothy, and Timothy tempted the monk.

"'You are painting the Betrayal, Father?' said Timothy.

"'That is true,' Simon answered.

"'Judas must be as hard to paint as the Blessed Lord,' said Timothy, the sleek villain.

"'I find such an evil face hard to depict,' Father Simon replied.

"'Do you take your faces from nature?' said Timothy.

"'When I may,' Father Simon said.

"Just then old Father Anthony passed them, scowled and coughed.

"'What a peculiar face our dear Father Anthony has,' said Timothy, 'and what a dreadful cough.'

"'He coughs all night, and he sleeps in the cell next to mine,' Simon replied.

"The devil did the rest.

"He worked on the mind of Father Simon and played upon his imagination in such a way that at

last he became infuriated with the old monk Anthony.

"One day Timothy in a burst of confidence told Father Simon how he hated Father Anthony, and then asked after the picture. It was all finished but the head of Judas.

"'The head of Judas,' said Timothy, eyebrows up.

"Again, as luck and the devil would have it, Father Anthony passed by.

"The thought struck both Simon and Timothy at once. They parted; Timothy to his cheating, Father Simon to his picture. In a month it was finished. No one, not even the Father Prior, was allowed to see it. Father Simon looked weary but triumphant.

"Timothy met him the day before the great feast.

"'I took your suggestion,' said Father Simon, 'and used his face.'

"'Father Anthony's?' asked Timothy.

"Simon nodded.

"The devil (if you will believe me) chuckled, and went below to blow up the fire.

"The day arrived, and the church was packed. Over the high altar the picture had been placed

by Father Simon himself. He would allow no one to touch it. The picture was concealed by a heavy curtain.

"After high mass was over, the Father Prior was to come forward, remove the curtain and bless the new altar-piece.

"All the time during mass Father Simon watched Father Anthony out of the corner of his eye, and Timothy watched Simon.

"Mass ended, and the Father Prior went to the altar again and stood waiting.

"Two monks stood at each side of the altar-piece, waiting to pull the curtain.

"The signal was given. The heavy curtain was drawn apart, and the picture stood disclosed in all its beautiful colour.

"Then Father Simon stared wild-eyed at his masterpiece, white, teeth clenched, hands gripping his stall.

"There, instead of the face of Father Anthony on the figure of Judas, was his own face distorted with passion.

"He reeled a moment, and then made his way out of the choir, and out of the sanctuary.

"Timothy also had an awful moment, in which he stifled a cry. There, it seemed to him, was his own

face as Judas, instead of the face of Father Anthony. He stayed where he was, numbed, frightened.

"At the same time the Father Prior, the monks, and those of the congregation who could see the painting, were filled with wonder, for they saw that where the face of Judas should have been there was an empty space, showing the plain preparation of the panel.

"The Father Prior, however, finished the blessing, and the people slowly left the church, wondering what idea lay at the back of the omission of the face of Judas.

"Timothy, the merchant, remained behind, sunk on his knees.

"'O Lord,' he cried, 'pardon my great sin, for it is indeed I who have betrayed Thee by base means. O Lord, forgive me!'

"As he said this he buried his face in his hands and cried piteously.

"A hand was laid on his shoulder, and he looked up.

"'What is it, my son?' said Father Anthony.

"Then, and as he was, Timothy poured out the story, and Father Anthony listened.

"'Forasmuch as the sin was in part mine,' he

said, when Timothy had finished, 'I will only say to you, go and sin no more. It was I, with my harshness to you, my son. Forgive me.'

"Timothy kissed the old monk's hand, and rose from his knees to go.

"Then there came a noise of men running, and some people came quickly into the church.

"Behind came four men, carrying something on a bier. This they laid down and came to Father Anthony.

"'Father,' one cried, 'here is an awful thing, a most fearful and horrid trouble.'

"'Father Simon,' another broke out, 'has hanged himself, and we have brought him here.'

"'We found him,' a third said, 'on a tree in an orchard outside the walls.'

"The fourth said, 'Folk saw him go quickly before the Blessing was over, and pass through the town and out by the East Gate. As we came by the orchard we saw him hanging.'

"Father Anthony came to where the body lay, and lifted the cloth which covered the face.

"The face of Father Simon was not twisted by the violence of his death, but showed calm and peaceful.

"'The ways of the Lord are beyond our under-

standing,' said Father Anthony. 'May his soul rest in peace.'

"To Timothy the sight was too much to look upon.

"The men, on the word of Father Anthony, went to the door giving on to the monastery.

"'Tell the Brother Porter,' he said.

"'It is not like the face of a lost soul,' said Timothy.

"'My son,' replied the old monk, 'there are many things which are not revealed.'

"Timothy left the church with bowed head, having said a prayer for the dead monk. He left the church and went straight to the owner of that orchard where Father Simon had hanged himself.

"'Sir,' he said, 'I wish to buy this place.'

"The owner was only too glad to get rid of the orchard, and he said as much, asking, however, the reason of the strange request.

"'I wish to buy the place,' Timothy said, 'and to give it to the monks, that it may be called Pardon Yard, and be a place where those poor souls who come to a violent end by their own hand, and felons and the like, may be buried.'

"So he bought the place, and gave it to the monks, who caused it to be consecrated.

"Here they buried Father Simon, and, later, many others.

"In other countries, kingdoms, and places, this has been copied, so many poor souls go to their last home in peace."

The King had listened most attentively, most earnestly, and now he looked at the stranger, who had gathered up the rabbit and was smoothing its ears.

"I thank you," he said simply.

For a moment the stranger was silent. Then he burst out in his old manner—

"Pooh! a sad sentimental story, a queer tale, what you will, just to pass the time, to while away an odd minute. But, saving your presence, I must be off. A crown is burning in my pouch, and they tell me that mine host at the 'Peter's Finger' draws fine ale, rare sack, and marvellous canary. A crown! blessed bones, I have a crown's worth. Samson, we are on our travels again."

He rose and picked up his cloak, tattered and torn; took up his bundle and staff, put the rabbit in the folds of his tunic, by his bosom, and stretched out his hand.

"Good-bye, dear boy, good-bye, Peter; beware of the women."

"Good-bye, excellent stranger," said Peter, "I thank you again for the tale."

"Tale! Blessed bones, I've a thousand in my pate; good-bye."

So he stepped across the fields, through a gap in the hedge, turned, waved, and was gone.



THE THIRTEENTH YEAR

THE BATTLE OF THE TENTS

ON a wooden platform built by the Castle Gate, facing the market-place, stood the Lord Constable in half-armour, a cloak about his shoulders billowing in the wind.

Below him, with their faces upturned, the men of the town, all armed; the men from round about, some armed with pikes or sickles mounted on rough sticks, with swords, bows, shields, and daggers; every sort of weapon, every kind of protection; leather tunics, helmets, heavy cloaks, shields made of skins toughened and stretched on iron rims.

With them ragged mercenaries a few, with faces burnt red-brown by skies of many lands; scarred, dusty, good fighters—but not always to be trusted.

Behind them soldiers of the town, worn with much fighting, waiting their turn to line the walls.

It was a moment of much peril, great anxiety.

About the walls was a great army ; all the friends, cousins, and soldiers of the Hamstall families, all the soldiers of Emms and round about, mercenaries also, and siege trains.

The men of the town were weary and disaffected. To them, on this wild March morning, the Lord Constable spoke.

From every window women's heads peered out. The gusty wind blew leaves about the square and tossed them in the air.

"So shall our foes be scattered in due time," the Constable said, leaning on the rail of the platform ; "so, if ye do but fight valiantly, will we play the wind to these foul traitors."

A man under the platform spoke.

"For thirty days and for as many nights we have done our best, and yet they still come on. Now is our food run short. Their galleys ride upon the seas, and ours dare not go forth to fight them. Our wives are faint, our children crying in the streets for bread."

"Last night," another said, "we saw the light of fires fill the sky where Langton burned. Before that, over the wood, we saw the smoke of five other villages."

A third broke in : "Aye, in the sky, a week

before this dreadful army came, we saw the clouds pile up to show a giant figure riding on a horse, a great sword in his hand, stretching from east to west."

"Aye," "True," "Well said," growled the crowd.

"Wives' tales and silly prophecies," the Constable went on. "Shall we, who in a hundred fights have proved victorious, leave our good town to burn because some clouds supply cheap poets with an image for their rhymes, because a village burns, because faint hearts are turned to water? Shall the valiant weep with them, and drown in a flood of tears a people once so proud?"

"Where are our knights, then?" said a man, "our fine armies who rode forth at night so prettily and never came again to mortal ken within our walls? Do their ghosts stalk the spoiled fields, or are they hidden in some foreign place until we all are butchered and lie bathed in our blood, our town burned, our hearths destroyed or made a nesting-place for Hamstalls and their kin?"

"The niceties of war are not for you," the Constable replied, "our cunning strategies are not made to be bellowed out to every lout who loafs about the market-place. I call upon you, men,

but once again, to put away all thought and follow us as we desire, and—God willing—ere the new moon shows her pale crescent in the sky we shall have routed and utterly destroyed this enemy."

"How shall this be done?"

"Listen to me," he went on; "let every man who is not needed on the walls or at the gates rest himself well this noon.

"When the monastery bell shall ring, arm you all, and go collect the herds of oxen and the flocks of sheep. A captain and a hundred lances and a hundred bowmen you will find planted at each gate. A man, at my command, will tell you into companies—then shall you drive the oxen and the sheep down to the gates as you are bid, and wait."

"The plan does not commend itself to us," said a man, a merchant fully armed. "What shall we do for food if we shall lose our few remaining beasts?"

"Hear, good men all," said the Constable, "we have a very desperate enterprise; the enemy is camped about the walls, from here"—his arm uplifted as he spoke, and he pointed—"a thousand tents and scores of men are seen, men scorning our soft fields underfoot, and horses tethered in our

barns. Farms, you see, whose burning has for many nights lit us to bed and stung our nostrils as we woke, scenting the morning air with grim reminder of our desolation. Villages, we know, are held under subjection. You men of Langton, see your burning homes; you of Borewood, you men of Gorle, you netters from the fens, rise up again and arm yourselves mightily! No petty troubles must assail you now; no private woes or family disputes. Remember you are but one family, having one home—this Little Kingdom is your mother; your head, the King."

"The King, indeed," said a voice in the crowd, "a boy."

As a crowd is turned as one man, so this crowd, moved by this fresh objection, murmured and was sullen.

"The boy is father to the man," said the Constable.

"To what a man!" the voice said. "What promise has he shown us, listening all day to idle tales and old wives' gossip?"

"To what a man," the Constable replied, "shall this boy grow, coming of such a stock, topping a line of kings whose dry bones are mightier than your flesh and blood. Have you forgotten, men

of Gorle, the sweating heat, the deadly pestilence? You of Borewood, have you forgotten? Where are your memories, men of Langton—fishers of the fens? Have you forgotten the miracle of rain? What of your oaths—ah! Do you swear, all of you, by holy saints to cherish, love, obey, honour, and protect, but to forget it in your cups? *You*, mercenaries, ragged fighters, you may not know these things, but you are paid to fight, and not to love."

"Our cause is hopeless," said a captain of lances. "See how the enemy swarm on the plains, see the bowmen in their wooden towers, see the fields crushed beneath the horse and foot."

"Aye," cried another fellow, "that is well said; let us gain peace at any cost, sooner than let our homes be burnt, our women snatched away before our very eyes."

"You, Wilfred de Hone," said the Constable, "you were with me at Marlewood, when we took the town. Could we stay the hungry men? had we command over the lustful appetites of seven hundred mercenaries? Could we, in spite of tears and wailings, stop the awful things those soldiers did? And you—you recommend me that we give up this our well-beloved town!"

The crowd, who well knew the fearful things a town must suffer, even if peace were procured on the most advantageous terms, turned again at this new idea.

Some men came clattering through the market-place on their way to relieve the soldiers on the walls. They were well-trained old fighters, and for a moment they stood there and cheered "God save the King."

Half-heartedly the crowd took up the words and cheered.

The constant failure of the sorties had reduced the people to a dull weariness; the sight of the enemy, all victorious, sent their hearts low.

For fourteen years the little kingdom had been at peace, and now the people were difficult to manage who had once tasted war with fierce joy. Men who had grown up with the clash of arms sounding in their ears had become accustomed to the pipes of peace; women who had once buckled on their sons' and husbands' swords with grim pride, now held them in their arms and wept.

It was a difficult task that the Lord Constable had before him to urge these men to man the walls day and night, until his plans were well laid. So far he had succeeded, but to-day the citizens, and many of

the soldiery, were so worn and heartless that it seemed as if all his carefully laid schemes must fade away.

The men knew only that two very large troops of horse and many knights had ridden forth before the enemy had come as close as this, and that these men had not been seen again. He dared not speak his plans to the people for fear of spies and informers.

The people in the market-place talked together, and then one man, the merchant in armour, spoke—

"We have fought, my lord, as well as we may, and now, by reason of our danger, we do demand some better explanation of your plans."

"Wait, and trust to me," said the Constable, "and all shall be well."

"Do we go like sheep to our deaths, while the butcher drives behind?" angrily asked Wilfred de Hone.

"I will tell you nothing," said the Lord Constable, "and furthermore do charge the better among you to slit the mutinous tongues of those who dare to question me."

There was a stir in the crowd, and the Constable looked round.

The King, fully dressed in armour, came on to

the platform with some knights and ladies behind him.

The crowd was silent.

The market-place was packed with people, the side streets were full of soldiers.

The wind blew fiercely through the place, cold, shrill.

The King came forward and stood by the railing, looking down at the crowd; the Constable stood a little behind him.

"My friends," said Peter the King, "you do not welcome me. It is well: this is no time for cheers; nor is it the time for idleness, nor murmurings, nor sour looks. I am a boy, help me—I am a King, help me. I know that you are sick and ill at ease; I know that you have fought day and night, that your brothers and sons and husbands are dead."

They listened to him in silence.

"Now am I come from a parley with Eric of Hamstall, who leads their forces. He asked me for the keys of this town. I said I would sooner die than do this thing. Was I right?"

Still the crowd kept silent.

"Shall I call back Eric of Hamstall and deliver you to his mercy?"

"No, no!" they cried, waving their arms.

Then an arrow flew over the tops of the houses and over the heads of the people, and stuck, quivering, in the wood of the platform.

The Lord Constable, seeing its course, had started forward, but the King motioned him back.

He leant over the rail and plucked the arrow out with his hands. Then he held it over his head.

"This is from within the walls," he cried. "Will not some one find me this traitor?"

For answer the men on the edge of the crowd ran down the side streets to search from whence the arrow had come, and presently returned with a man, bow in hand—a mercenary, tattered and torn.

They led him, surrounded by soldiers, to the foot of the platform.

The man's face was sullen.

The Lord Constable came forward, his face burning with anger: "Kill him!" he shouted.

But the King held up his hand to stay the men who had drawn their daggers.

"Bring him nearer," he said. And they brought him nearer.

"Why did you do this?" he asked the man.

The mercenary remained silent.

The King leant over and signed to the guards to let the man go. Then he said to him, "Come here," and he came.

"Here is your arrow," said Peter, "fit it to your bow."

He did this, puzzled.

The people waited, not knowing what comedy or tragedy was being played.

"Now," said Peter, "let those who will not follow me and do my will without question, order this man to shoot."

Not one word, nor any noise whatever came from the listening crowd.

The man threw down his bow and arrow.

"You have spied on us and informed against us?" asked the King, and the man inclined his head.

"Then listen, all," the King cried. "Our plans are these. To-night when the monastery bell rings eight times, all will be gathered at the gates, with the oxen and sheep within the walls. At the eighth stroke a beacon will be lit on the top of the Sorcerer's Tower, without the walls, and you will see answering beacons to the north, the east, and west."

"For God His sake, do not tell all," said the Constable, in a low voice.

"This will show," the King continued, "that we are not so friendless as we seem; for the rest—wait."

A quick look came across the face of the mercenary.

The soldiers round him looked to the King.

"If there be any spies or informers among you," he said, "witness your end. Men——"

Ten daggers lifted and fell deep in the body of the mercenary. His blood gushed out on to the stones, making them crimson.

"Now depart," said Peter, "and await your orders."

So the crowd dispersed.

The men were gathered about the gates.

The crescent moon hung in a sky of stars. The wind had dropped and it was but three hours to daybreak.

Throughout the night, as the men collected into companies, the monks and friars walked among them, confessed them and gave the Holy Sacrament to them.

The women all went to the upper rooms in such

houses as were near the gates, or whence they could look on the field.

The King visited each gate in turn with the Lord Constable and some knights, and so cheered the men and saw that all was ready.

Next against the gates were flocks of sheep and oxen, bleating and lowing, for they could not understand the cause of their being so penned.

When the signal was given these were to be driven out, and so rushed against the enemy that it would be difficult for infantry or horsemen, in the dim uncertain light, to move among the mass of frightened animals.

The two troops of horse, who had long ago ridden out, were in hiding. A third had been collected far away, and were now in the Forest of Borewood. The first was hidden in a valley and wood to the west, the second was between the enemy and Emms in Emms Forest. So they had planned to drive the forces of the Hamstalls into the sea.

The men about the gates talked but little. Here a man looked to the fastening of his armour ; there a bowman tried the string of his bow, and adjusted the arrows in his belt.

Outside the town, to the east, the enemy was

drawn up in a semicircle, from the downs by the sea to the banks of the river Candida—across which they had thrown two wooden bridges.

The monastery bell began tolling. The women's hearts beat hard as they heard the dull sound.

The eighth bell rang, and at once a tongue of flame sprang from the top of the Sorcerer's Tower.

Still no orders were given.

Then a faint speck of light showed behind the enemy, over by Emms. Then another brighter light to the west. Then after a moment the beacon at Borewood showed.

The gates swung open.

Already the dawn showed in the east, and now the enemy roused quickly, seeing some new movement, and bewildered by the fires.

On rushed the King's men, the sheep and oxen in front; the infantry, pikemen, swordsmen, and others behind; behind them the archers, and on either side bands of knights and horsemen.

They poured out of the gates and down to the river.

For weeks men in the town had been preparing bridges, and now these were found by the river. They had sent great farm carts chained

to one another into the river, and boarded them over, securing them to the banks by ropes and chains.

Over these many bridges the army poured, and so drew up on the plains.

Guided by men of the Fens, the troop of horse waiting at Borewood crossed the dangerous marshes and came up; the western troop spurred to the battle, and from the north the other horsemen rode.

Now they pushed forward to meet the enemy, who, confused, not taking in the desperate situation, blundered and were lost.

The sheep and oxen dashed over the ground, terrified by the shouts of men who rode by them on horseback, lashing at them with long whips, and so when the horsemen of Hamstall clustered together to charge, they came into the midst of these animals, and broke their strength.

The King was with the men from the East Gate and saw the confusion.

The dawn crept up, grey, mysterious. It began to drizzle with rain.

The King turned to the Lord Constable and shouted to him over the din of the battle, that he must charge.

The Constable looked smiling at this boy, his face set, white, his eyes sparkling.

The enemy broke the ranks of pikemen in one place, and came crashing along on light armoured horses, to where the King was with his knights.

As the sky grew lighter and the rain fell more heavily, the men coming at them looked like part of the morning—dull lights shining on their armour, a forest of little pennants waving in the air.

Peter nerved himself to meet the crash of the charge, when he found the rein of his horse seized, and he, despite himself, drawn into a safer place.

The two companies of horse met, like wave beating on wave. The tossing sea of arms and lances, swords and banners, gave no clue to whom the victor was. Cries, yells, and taunts rent the air; the King's horse plunged and reared.

He himself leaned forward on his horse, his underlip quivering with excitement, his body in a heavy sweat, his sword arm drawn back ready to strike.

Once the Constable saved his life as he was being ridden down; once by an adroit movement he saved himself; once Galeran and Sir Godfrey

got together in front of him and saved him from death.

The rain poured down in torrents, and obliterated all but the immediate combatants. The day grew lighter, and the press of men began to cease.

Then, as they were unmolested, the King and his men rode to another part of the field and saw the enemy lie thick upon the grass, and friends too thick enough among them.

They got to the tents of their enemies and saw there such a fight as none of them, old fighters, men of many campaigns, had seen. The whole was like some wild dream of men, men, men, fighting and struggling under a great cloth. The tents bulged and heaved and tore with fighting men,—belched forth blood, and men fell to the ground with men still fighting under them.

Here love played little part save love of gain and lust of blood; here conqueror Death rode, blood-proud and ghastly.

The enemy had been taken in their tents, and here the hottest slaughter was.

Men, whose faces showed pale in the first agony of death, still stabbed and hewed while strength was left.

The mercenaries, now quite out of hand, fought with each other for spoils and plunder.

To witness this Battle of the Tents with its grim sea of angry faces, flashing swords and thrusting pikes, was almost to see a vision of the fiends of hell unloosed upon the earth.

The rain poured down and filled the bagging tents with pools of water in the hollows where they sagged, so that when from underneath a man rose up, he sent a shower of water all around.

It ended slowly, but most surely; slowly, because men fought with men single-handed for a piece of plate, a bag of gold, or rich embroideries; surely, because the enemy were driven to the downs, and from the downs over the cliffs, to fall upon the stony beach, or asked for quarter, seeing that all was lost.

Eric of Hamstall, his three brothers, his uncle, and most of his relations, had perished; some knights had fled, some were taken prisoners.

Peter the King, the lion's whelp—so the knights called him now—had bathed his sword in blood. A boy of thirteen years, in those wild days, must show his mettle if he wished to keep his kingdom.

Soon the Constable called a meeting of such knights and captains as he could find about, to count the cost of the freedom they had so hardly won.

In the drenching rain they stood unhelmeted to meet the air and bathe in the cold wind.

Near a pile of corpses they all stood, and so the Constable spoke, heavy at heart—

"Here be the dead; here was my son slain. About him lie his foes, thick strewn. They were brave men, too, for cowardice was never counted as their sin, but foul conspiracy and horrid treachery. So shall the old saying be reversed, for in this case these dead shall tell us tales that we can ne'er forget, tales that our sons' sons shall lisp, our women sew in tapestry, our painters work on panels, and our scribes set down in deathless songs and tales.

"So let them lie and so the rain pour on them, friend and foe alike, for Nature knows no politics. So let them all be buried as they lie, in Mother Earth, without more reverence to friend than foe, for corpses are not friends or foes, but brothers. And, Father Abbot, you, in virtue of your sacred office, will say a prayer, now, for these poor souls who naked stand before the judgment throne of God."

He turned away and left them, heavy with his grief, nor ever looked again upon his son.

The King, still quivering with the tension of the battle, felt sick and faint at all the grisly sights, and so rode back among his knights to the town, where tears mixed with songs, and songs with dirges for the dead.

THE FOURTEENTH YEAR

FAINT HEART NEVER WON FAIR LADY

"COME off the wall!" shouted a man.

Toby, the King's Jester, lifted a fat finger at him and smiled till his three chins doubled over each other.

"It is not safe," called out another fellow.

"Fools fear a fall as much as any man," said Toby, tapping his nose with the same finger, "but fools never fall so far as wise men do, being so lowly at the start."

"Thy weight will bring the crumbling walls hurrying about thy ears, Master Toby," a merchant called.

"Ah! Master Moneygetter, I am safer here than a bad-balanced account," Toby replied.

The crowd laughed with him as they stood about the foot of the cracked wall of the Sorcerer's Tower, the remains of which were being pulled down after the fire of the last year.

Toby knocked away some hard mud from the wall with his wooden bauble, and put it in his hand.

He looked down on the crowd, whose upturned faces showed like a bed of pink flowers, and saw there a black friar standing by Cicely the milkmaid, who was with her mother, Goody Mumm.

Taking a piece of mud, he threw it down and hit the friar.

"Lord!" he said, "I have aimed at a thrush and killed a crow."

The friar puckered his brows and the crowd smiled.

"Good-for-nothing rascal," said the friar. He was a portly, important man.

"Many a parish priest forgets he was ever a holy-water clerk," Toby called, apparently to the birds of the air.

"Thou art an impudent sinner, without reverence," the friar called, and turned to make his way out of the crowd.

"No penny, no paternoster," Toby replied.

A child stood on the other side of the friar, and as he turned he patted her head.

"The crow thinks her own birds are fairest," said Toby, to the retreating friar.

The child nestled up to the milkmaid, Cicely, and a young man came and stood in the friar's place.

"Many would kiss the child for love of the nurse," called Toby—at which the youth reddened and turned also to leave, but was hemmed in by the crowd.

"Never fear," said Toby to the unfortunate youth, "there's many a kiss unkissed is as good as a marriage bond."

"My girl Cicely is an honest girl and a good girl," called Goody Mumm.

"Lord!" Toby called from his perch, "what's come to the world when pretty maids are vouched for by their mothers? Eh, poppet! look up; he'll kiss thee yet, ere it be dark."

The youth, who knew not Cicely, but vastly admired her, was at a loss what to do, but Goody Mumm pulled her by the sleeve and called out to Toby, "Shame-face, to sit there putting such thoughts into my maid's head."

"Good dame, I'll come down myself and kiss the pretty wench, and so make good my word."

The woman hustled her daughter out of the pack of people with angry glances at the innocent youth.

Toby, laughing, his jolly face red with delight, climbed down the other side of the wall and stood among the crowd.

As he came down the King was passing on foot, having gone alone, as his custom was, to see what all this gathering might mean.

To him, at once, went Toby the Jester, and with a familiarity admitted only to such men, took the King's arm within his own, and marched him out of the crowd into the country, over the downs.

They came to where a giant chestnut tree stood, and here the Jester stopped and bowed his King into a mossy seat, then set himself down carefully on the grass—carefully, by reason of his bulk.

The King maintained an amused silence.

"Here in this grateful solitude I will expound to you my fool's philosophy," Toby said, "that is, if you will."

"I should much like to know a fool's philosophy," the King replied, "for I have been always taught that only wise men have philosophies and fools but foolishness."

A happy grin overspread the Jester's face.

"'Tis there that we be wronged, as I will show you, good master. What does the wise man do? He writes that 'Ignorance is bliss,' and spends his days a-grubbing after knowledge. And then, when he comes to his life's weary end, what does he

find? That he is only ignorant, despite his books and toil, and that he is too tired to be blissful. And this is the wisdom of the wise. What does the fool say? He says that indiscretion places man above the angels. Love places men above other men, and so degrees again above the angels. All the world loves a lover, and would be near a lover. So who shall remember in their age certain cossetings and fair words and snatched kisses, shall taste joy all their autumn days, as they lived joyfully all the spring-time of their youth, and so shame the wise, who steep their quills in ink to no purpose. Deeds with a maid are far more eloquent than words—so poets in the lists of love bow down before a soldier; or, here's my mark, a rash fool who steps in, kisses, kisses again before the maid has turned her mind against him; mark me, after she won't—oh no! trust poor Toby, the silly fool."

Peter the King waved his hand and couched himself more comfortably on the bank.

"Love, sire; laugh and grow fat and foolish—'tis the thing. The lean man—bah! he hath an hungry soul. A well-lined paunch is half a good man's furniture. Can you pray unfed? Aye, you can ask for things, but can you praise? Can you

fight unfed? or think unfed? I, being but a fool, think not, but let the thoughts fly through me if they will.—I weary you."

"Oh no, good fool, go on," said Peter lazily from his seat.

The chestnut tree dappled the ground with shadows in quaint patterns, and the mild cows made summer music as they moved, slow-footed, on the velvet grass.

"I did speak of love," the Fool went on, "that madcap thing which makes a maid afraid, turns youths to men, and men to poets. That silly thing, which is so contrary that the more it spends the more it grows in richness. That ill-tuned thing, which makes men ill at ease. That fateful thing which makes men quiver on the pinnacles of life, and from their giddy height look down upon the world and think that they are gods. Which makes plain men fair, and fair men beautiful; which holds all men in servitude, and rocks them in a passion-song to altar or to grave. A rare business, a rotten business—a very pleasant sport."

"It is a thing," said Peter languidly, "with which I am not acquainted."

"When the voice breaks," said Toby, "the heart often breaks a little with it—expands, I ought

to say, and takes a deeper note. Would you that I tell you a story of love, a pert history?"

"As you please," said the King, chewing a cowslip stalk.

"'Twas in this wise. There is a man lives about here, the ugliest in seven hundred miles, I'll vow. God made man in His own image, eh, sire?"

"Yes," Peter replied.

"Well then, some subtle-minded devil made this fellow. Did ever see a toad speer up at you from out of a dock-leaf bower, his evil wrinkled face mottled like a rotten medlar, his green eyes shining like two glow-worms on a bed of twisted mossy rock?

"Jock's face was worse than that. It was a map of ill-digested sack and heavy beer, seamed with great lines and dotted mountainously with ill-looking pimples; a rheumy eye he had on one side, and on t'other side an eye like to a fish turning to swim sideways under the bridge of 's nose. Withal not a mournful countenance, but a signboard of many taverns, a bush to many rotten wines. This is a love story, is it not?"

"I believe you said so," said the King.

"It is a tale of love," Toby went on, "and there you have the picture of the hero. One evening at

the 'Peter's Finger' certain choice spirits bore me there for company. The very sight of cap and bells passes for wit among some crowds. Well, we entered in and called the drawer. There was Mumm the Miller, and Jock, Robert Hyrenmonger, and Marke atte Downe, William Pullet, and I.

"Some one had money, so we drank. You have not tasted the delights of drink—well—better so. So as we pledged each other in our cups we took a breath—a breath it was laden with spiced sack—and pledged—woman. Lord! to see Jock's blotty face covered with his leather mug, a-drinking love and what you like, to beautiful woman. I winked at Mumm, he passed it on to Bob, and so to Marke, and Marke nudged William Pullet.

"'Thou shouldst a' married, Jock,' said I.

"He gurgled in his cup and set it down; his good eye turned upon us, twinkling.

"'And where's the maid would look on boss-eyed Jock?' he said.

"''Tis the heart of a man and the hand in the purse, that maids look to,' said I.

"'Aye, my heart is in the right place,' said Jock.

"'Next to thy stomach,' I said.

"'Hold, fat fool,' said he, half laughing, 'look to yourself and your three chins and your huge girth.'

"Now, sire, I am a round enough man, but praise the lucky pigs, I am as firm and tight as a cheese in her skin, whereas Jock was fat, but lapped in rolls, and hung uncomfortably, a jelly of a man.

"'Moreover,' I went on, 'a certain dame hath whispered in my ear such tales of love, such agonies of languish, and all for thee, blotched Jock.'

"'Man,' cried he, 'give her a name, and before a week be out I'll change it.'

"'Names,' I said soberly, 'are a quick sauce to the fine meat of gossip—so, my friend, before I dress thy dish with names, do thou cool my throat with sack.'

"'Drink for all,' cried Jock, 'and let us hear the name of this fair lady, with whom, in truth, I am already half in love.'

"'With love, Master Jock, there is always sorrow, so be tardy and careful in thy wooing.'

"'Sorrow,' quoth he, 'I'll drown sorrow in a butt.'

"'Sorrow,' I said, 'will never drown; she floats, with her white face and nipping fingers ever on the surface. There are two ways a man may try to drown her—enough wine and too much: enough in a good bottle, friend, calls aloud for more, too much for less—hence oblivion; and in the morning

Sorrow comes drumming on the brain, and, pinching the hot fevered flesh with tireless fingers, makes the tongue dry and the hands moist.'

"'When did fools turn preachers?' cried Jock.

"'When wise men with boss-eyes buried their brains in leather jacks,' I replied, 'and soon, Jock, with your arm crooked out and your mouth open, you'll make a pretty tankard of yourself.'

"'Hi! drink for all again,' cried the Miller. 'This is no time for rotten rivalry; tell him about the lady, Toby.'

"'I will,' said I. 'See here, Jock—my, but it is a pity throwing pretty ladies in front of such.'

"'Tell him,' said the Miller.

"'Shall I tell thee, Jock, how she sighed for thee, how she rolled about for very love of thee, how she perked and pranced, pouted and panted, all for thee, surly Jock?'

"I tell thee, sire, that the good eye was getting watery with sack and dreams, and Jock was pulling himself together in a fuddling manner, to give a certain drunken dignity to this appeal. Truly love makes all men dancing-masters.

"'I'll see the wench now,' said he. 'By Saint Venus men speak of, I will pay my court this very hour—nay, stay me not, good fellows, except—hi,

drawer, another round, to keep my courage up.—Now, rogue fool, give me her name."

"'Dorcas,' said I, on the tongue of the moment.

"'Dorcas, your eyes, my dear,' said Jock, getting by now mushey in his cups. 'That sounds a wooden-faced wench, but who am I, to pick and choose? But what a name it is to make a man's mouth water.—'Dorcas, do this,' 'Dorcas, bring me a jack of beer,' 'Dorcas, be silent, be still, be obedient,' 'Dorcas, I love thee.'

"'Good, good, excellent good!' all cried in chorus.

"'Now, comrades, lead on to Love,' the drunken Jock called, in a husky voice."

"Was there such a lady?" the King asked, smiling.

"I blush for thy youth," Toby replied, "to want to hear at once about the maid. Think of her—white flesh and yellow teeth, a body most luxurious and fat; a comfortable dame; her nose long pushed to scent the air; her eyes small and crimson at the edge; her tail——"

"Her tail?" asked the King.

"Hold thyself ready," said Toby, "Dorcas was a sow!"

"Oh, wicked knavery!" the King said, laughing; "but proceed."

"We helped the fellow to his feet: his thoughts in heaven left them forgetful of the earth, so that they, finding themselves passed over in his mind, wandered apart and failed to keep him up. Out into the night we led him, praising all the while this Dorcas—that is, Mumm and I praised and helped poor Jock, the others lagged behind to hush their laughter. Once it came to Jock's ear, as they laughed louder.

"'Jealousy,' he said in a dignified way, and attempted to pose himself in a haughty manner; in doing so, fell down, and we with him. Oh! a merry night!

"In such a tortuous way we reached the back of his own house—for Jock's no pauper, but in some way keeps up his trade; and here was the foul kennel where he kept his sow.

"In the dark night of cloudy sky, and by his own dark mind, smeared from all truth by drink, he did not know the place.

"Marke and William Pullet climbed the wall and went up to the sow.

"We—that is Mumm and I—held fast to Jock, who trembled in his shoes.

"'Does the divine and sweet one live in this neighbourhood?' he asked.

"'Indeed,' I said, 'if rough shells of oysters may hold pearls, may not an alley hold a godess?'

"'But she sleeps, I'll warrant,' he replied.

"'That is true,' said Mumm, 'but thou must waken her out of her beauty sleep by dulcet strains and hymns of lovely praise.'

"'Be silent,' Jock replied. 'I know the manners and ways of courtship, man—who've dreamt on it for all these years, but never hoped to practise my good gifts.'

"He lifted up his voice: 'Oh! sweet Lady Dorcas, be pitiful to my plight, and grant me but one word.'

"We listened eagerly, and heard Marke and William Pullet prod the sow with sticks.

"'She moves,' cried Jock; 'leave me, rascals.'

"We left him, and at once he fell upon the ground.

"'Oh! faint with love!' he cried, as he lay there sprawling like a beetle on its back.

"'With sack,' said Mumm.

"'Disgusting fellow!' said Jock, 'I tell thee butts of sack would leave my head clear; 'tis my feet turned traitors to me. Help me up.'

"We pulled him to his feet again and set him straight.

"'Open your window, love,' he pleaded, 'that I may gaze upon your face and hear your soothing voice.'

"There was a moment when it seemed the world was silent. Then a great grunt came from over the wall.

"'Tis a strange voice,' said Jock, in a whisper.

"'Go on, man,' I said, 'likely she hath a cold.'

"'Oh! dear and lucky cold,' he said, 'to be in such a head.'

"'Speak to her, man,' said Mumm.

"A second grunt came out into the air.

"'Dorcas,' cried Jock, 'I do not know thee, but fain would; these gentlemen have spoken in mine ear secrets to me before. Thou lovest me? Oh, Dorcas, say the words.'

"A rumble and a tumble in the sty, and then a fast and furious grunting; Marke and William Pullet were using their sticks well.

"Jock was enwrapped in drunken admiration of himself. 'A voice,' he cried, 'like butter on a dish, a very mellow voice, a voice like rich cream, a speech like mulled wine; but, good fool, mine ears are in rebellion also as my feet; I cannot hear what words she speaks.'

"'She did say,' I called to him, 'Jock, mine own

love, I beg of you to cease your wail, or else my father will hear us.'

"'Have mercy,' said Jock; 'her father doubtless is some powerful merchant. I shall be gone.'

"'Thou art a weak-kneed lover,' I said to him. 'Over the wall, man, to see her in the garden, and clasp her in thine arms and speak fair with her.'

"'Oh, Toby, I dare not,' he replied.

"'Who does not dare in love,' I said, 'is destined to a lonely life, and is like to be a butt for his fellows.'

"'Who said I dared not?' he flared up at us; 'help me over the wall you shall, as these accursed legs of mine seem to have taken a will unto themselves and act apart and drunkenly.'

"Robert and Mumm and I got him to the wall, but here he stopped.

"'No,' he said, 'I am not pricked out for such a flower; and besides, it is not seemly to take a maid by storm.'

"'Silly coward,' we called, all of us, 'to fear to take the leap.'

"'Coward!' said he, in anger, 'come on.'

"So we hoisted and heaved him and dropped him over the wall into the sty. There he slept till morning by the sow.

"There's a rare love story for thee, sire; a neat contrivance, for we tired of hearing this one-eyed rotten fellow talk big and bold of what he'd do if any maid should cast an eye at him; so we served him in this way.

"Now, sire, what might you think of Love from that side?"

"A grim thing enough," the King said, sitting up, "and none too pleasant; but I do see that in some 'tis love of self is master over love of love, or love of maid."

"The very moral of it," said Toby, "the exact spit of my history, pat, pert, and significant."

"Still, Love is not for me," the King said. "I shall be a fighter."

"Aye, sire," said Toby, "we be all fighters here, from King to knave, fighters of ourselves; and when Love lightly comes and knocks upon the door of Hearte, open quickly, good my lord, and bow down. This Love has many vessels in his hand which you will not know in your green youth—passion and comfort, hot blood and cool sweetness—so comes Love, with gifts, and all of these you must needs take; not one and leave another, for so are great loves spoilt and marred.

"Strange talk," the King said.

"And before seven years run out their course you will hear stranger talk, spoken with your own lips in private to your ear alone."

The King rose, because he did not understand, nor did he want to know.

"Well," said fat Toby, rising also, "I've kept you here a-listening to my fool's prattle, so I will wish you, sire, a merry day and less of me, for I grow heavier in my words as I gain pounds of flesh. But remember this—man was not made to live alone. It is better to be fat and forty than have a great tomb in the abbey church."

He shook his head till the bells on his cap rang cheerfully.

"We, sire, are the love-puppets of peoples—a crown, a cap and bells, a cup of ale, a crony, and a good wife by the fire—that's a man's life. Good day."

THE FIFTEENTH YEAR

THE MADONNA OF THE DOORSTEP

IT was a summer evening and the sun was low; the gnats were buzzing in the lanes, long shadows lay across the streets, and drowsy peace replaced the hum of day.

Peter the King walked slowly in the narrow streets that ran along the water side, heard rough sailors singing in their taverns, and saw brown-bearded men with clear blue eyes move leisurely along.

He came presently to the Gate of the Jewry, and thought that he would, for the first time, venture in.

He entered, and at once the sweet air seemed polluted by the place. On every side of the small court on to which the gate opened, low houses overhung; they seemed like misshapen men bunched together over a greasy meal.

The street ran with foul liquids, and these streams were stopped, retarded, choked with rotting vegetables. Poisonous vapours rose from the damp stones and chilled the air; the windows sent

out clouds of steam where food was being prepared, and added more unsavoury smells to the already laden place.

So huddled together the houses were, that their peaked roofs met in bewildering curves and angles, and mixed them utterly, as if the old men's locks mingled over each other's heads as they crouched down, trying to shut out the sky.

Overhead pale primrose clouds floated, mocking the dingy world below.

Peter had put on an old cloak of brown, which hid his yellow clothes, so that the old Jews in tattered gaberdines who shuffled in the street, passed by unheeding.

Not knowing, in his wonder, where to go, he chose the alley straight in front of him, and picked his way to the small archway which led into it. Here again the same ill-natured, brooding houses hung over the street—so close together now, that like the hunchbacked old men, they seemed to rest head almost touching head.

A few fat women, slopped and sleepy-eyed, stared at him as he stood regarding the queer scene; a few dark children stopped their muddy games, and looked at him out of their coal-black eyes.

Then after all this evening silence, broken only by shrill childish cries, came the sound, "Jew! Jew!" from outside.

On this the women vanished into the doorways, and the children fled scrambling up the street.

A man came tearing through the archway, panting heavily—a dirty, greasy-looking man, whose face was smeared with a great stain of blood.

He stopped by the black hollow of the arch and listened, but the cry of "Jew!" was faded into the distance.

Then this heavily-breathing man, white through all his dirt and blood with fear, went to the end of the street and disappeared into one of the houses.

All this while the King stood, back to a wall, watching.

On the first cry all the women had gone in save one, and she looked barely a woman.

She sat on the doorstep of the very house into which the panting Jew had hurried, and when he went in quickly, brushing past her, she had not stirred nor shown a sign of life.

In the increasing dusk there was something in the forlorn attitude of this girl which interested Peter; she looked so lonely, so mysterious, sitting in the dim light on the low doorstep.

He went to the other side of the street and walked up to her.

As he came up, she put her head a little on one side as if to listen, but otherwise was still.

When he was close to her the King saw that she was clean and neat and quite a girl, nor did she seem quite so forlorn, for, though he could not see her eyes in the dusk, he saw a pleasant smile about her lips.

Her hair was black and thick, and waved about her shoulders prettily; her hands were folded in her lap, and in the dim light looked like two white flowers curled to sleep.

He stood there wondering how such a flower grew in such a place, like a cool iris by a stagnant pool.

Not knowing how to address her, he said, after a while—

"Lady,"—it seemed the most appropriate title—"lady, who was that man?"

"My father," the girl replied, nor moved her head.

Her voice was like the voice of one lost in a delicious dream.

"Your father! What is your name, lady?" he asked.

"Miriam," she said, in her sad, dreamy voice.

The King was at a loss; he felt himself a worm upon the earth, that he should live so cleanly and well when such a girl as this—about his own age—had to exist among these terrible surroundings.

"Miriam," he said, "how do you live in such a place as this?"

She seemed to come slowly out of her fine thoughts.

"You are a stranger," she said, "or you would not ask. I have so much to do, so much to dream of; and I have my son."

A girl of seventeen she was, this calm, dreaming maid.

"Would you like to see him?" she asked, and without waiting for an answer, rose and went into the house.

It seemed to the King as if he had stepped on to an old, faded, and dirty carpet, and had found a spot where something precious had once stood, and so preserved the colours bright and fair.

Miriam came out, her head bent over a bundle in her arms. She was crooning softly.

"Hush!" she said, "he is asleep."

Then she sat down again upon the step.

Peter felt that he ought to remain standing.

"When he sleeps," she said, "I may dream my dreams, and dreams are life, as life is nothing but a dream. Then I may wander in this street, my kingdom, and know its palaces and flowers."

Peter, bewildered, held his peace.

"You, I think, are some noble strayed into my kingdom on a chance."

"Your kingdom?" said Peter, astonished.

For answer she rose, and walked again into the house, coming from thence empty armed.

"Stranger," said Miriam; "as you do not seem to understand, and as for some reason I desire that you should, I will show you. Give me your hand."

Hand in hand they stood in that foul-smelling alley, where houses dropped dank moisture on the stones, and stones gave fearful slimes, and slimes gave pestilence.

Hand in hand they stood, while overhead was a crimson light, as the afterglow painted the sky in the slit between the roofs—looking as if one lived in hell and gazed far off upon the gates of Paradise.

She led him, half frightened as he was and hushed, along the walls, she touching them with nervous fingers lovingly.

"Here," said Miriam, as she stopped before an

evil-looking door, "here is the door which guards a well-kept garden, full of flowers. I am forbidden here, but the sweet scents flow from the flowers to me, attracted by my love. A lovely door it is, carved with dear symbols of all garden lore, and hung with some sweet-scented climbing thing I may not reach, but love to feel its breath.

Peter the King looked at the door, and saw a rotten wooden thing, uncarved, cracked, dingy with rust from long-untended hinges. Saw, as he looked, a long-deserted house, whose windows hung with cobwebs, saw a poor battered roof, half tiled, and over all the glow of sunset clouds.

They walked along.

"Now," said she, at the far end of the street, where a black-browed house hung dripping on the stones, "here is—— Are you a Christian?"

"Yes," replied the King.

"And I, at heart," the girl said longingly. "Here is a tiny chapel, reverently built to hold the Man Who Died and the sweet spirit of His Mother—you will understand. Here I stand, often, with my baby in my arms, and get rare comfort from the thought. This chapel——"

At this the King, bewildered beyond thought, broke in—

"But there is no chapel!"

The girl turned up her face to him, so that he saw it clearly for the first time; in the queer, troubled light he saw that she was blind.

A passion of grief came over him, so that he could have torn his own eyes from their sockets if the act would have done her any good.

Then he saw that his own seeing eyes were truly blind—that he, in all his state, walked in black darkness beside this girl. He saw that he, with all the riches of the world, with fine colours, pomp and dignity, had not imagination enough to be content.

Here was this girl, a member of the downtrodden race, living in a fœtid alley, amid misery, ruin, vice, and fearful evils; blind, with—as he guessed right, even in his tender years—her fatherless son, content—more than content—happy, luxuriating in her mind.

He grew at once, and left another period of his youth behind, and added to his store of years through this blind, happy, Jewish girl.

As he stood pondering, she said, in her sweet, dreamy voice, "You see it, too."

"See it," he said, "a hundred times; see graces grow where evils flourish, see wheat without the tares, see heaven in places where only hell appears,

see beauty where foul rot corrupts, and ugliness where surface beauty shows."

"I know," she said, "that to the senses, actually, this place is foul; but in the dim corners of my mind I know that it is beautiful to me; that all this awful filth is but a husk; beneath rough faces men and women show as fair as—angels!"

"Messengers of God," the King replied.

"Messengers of God," she said, "speaking by their thoughts, not by their bodies or their deeds."

"So that mothers see their hunchback children fairest, their husbands' vices, virtues."

"So," she said, "is light in darkness always, and mothers' thoughts truer than men's deeds."

The afterglow died away, and the half light came.

Peter left the Jewish girl seated on the doorstep, where again she had brought her child and smothered him with kisses.

So, as he walked away, did this last picture linger in his mind.

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Three days later the Jews received command to leave their quarter, and—as it was summer—to camp in shelters built for them upon the downs about the walls.

The people murmured at the order, both the Jews and the other people of the town.

The Constable argued with the King, and said that he would bring about evils and distress, but he was not to be persuaded.

Peter ordered bands of carpenters and masons and all manner of workmen to him, and ordered that they should build, as he directed, all the quarter of the Jews afresh.

In seven weeks the Jewry was levelled to the ground, and the Jews cursed and groaned against this destruction of their houses.

Then in a short time, for all available men were set about the work, a new Jewry was built, rising on the ashes of the old. The streets were wider and better arranged, the houses were better fitted, the streets were better paved.

At the end of the alley where Miriam had pointed out the chapel, they built a tiny place, rich in ornament—a church to shrine the Man Who Died, and the sweet spirit of His Mother.

The Jewry itself did not take so long to build, but the church was long completing, so fair it was, carved and painted within, and carved without. Near by the ground outside the wall, were carved in panels of stone the stories of Moses, Joshua, David,

Solomon, Ruth, and Esther, so that the Jews must look upon the place with certain care. Within, were carvings of the saints, and a fair-painted statue of the Madonna and the Holy Child.

By late autumn, the houses were for the most part built—for it was a small place. In winter all was finished, and the Jews—downtrodden people—moved in amazement in their well-ordered place—a square of houses now, built within another square.

At the end of the square was the church, facing the new entrance gate.

By spring—so hard had the laborious task been done—the church was blessed, consecrated, used. To the Jews this was a sin, a wickedness, a perpetual taunt.

All this time the girl Miriam was kept back by the King's command, and treated well. She did not know what was taking place, but lingered, unmurmuring, among kind country folk.

In April, when all was ready, the King went down to Langton, where he had caused the girl to be lodged, and spoke to her.

Queer boy he was, half dreamer, half fighter—his mother's blood cooling the hot blood of his father; withal he inherited from both a strength of

purpose strange to his years, but equal to his royal tasks.

He found her, with the baby in her arms, sitting outside a cottage door: beloved of all the people, who believed in some strange and potent virtue from the blind.

"Miriam," he said; to which she answered, being now warned of his state, "Sire," and rose to greet him.

"What if your dreams came true?"

"My dreams," she answered, rocking for the child, "are true."

"But not so true as this," he then replied, putting a daisy into her hand.

"As true as this sweet flower I cannot see," she said, "because they are dreams. In this way, what I make for myself, I make round, whole, and complete; my dreams are so substantial that I live in them; breathe their air."

"But," he said, "not so true as the flower which is, while your dreams are not, being unsubstantial, faint, intangible."

"You cannot understand," she answered, with a sigh, "but you are kind, noble—— When may I go back to my kingdom?"

"Now," he said, triumphant, "now at once; I come to lead you there."

A litter waited for the girl, the attendants, round-eyed, wondering at the freak which made the King so helpful to a blind Jewish girl.

Peter mounted his horse and rode beside the litter, humming gladly to himself.

At the Jews' quarter they set her down and he dismounted.

"Will you take my hand?" he said.

She curled her baby on her arm, and placed her hand in his.

They walked through the new gateway and stood in the square, new built and glowing with the April sun.

"Where am I?" she asked, puzzled.

"In your kingdom," he replied.

For one instant she stood there, straight up, to drink the fresh air, scenting it with her nostrils.

"This is not my kingdom," she said hurriedly.

"It is, indeed," he said, smiling. "See!"

He led her to the place where, in her imagination, had stood a door, giving on to a well-ordered garden.

"Now," said he, in expectation of her pleasure; and let go of her hand.

Slowly, with outstretched hands, she felt along the wall, found the door, and reached above it;

there hung a rose, newly planted, but well grown ; a rose transplanted from the King's garden.

"Open the door," he said, waiting.

It opened on a latch, which she painfully found, and then went in.

A tiny garden lay within four walls, well ordered, swept and planted. In the centre a fountain played softly.

She felt her way along the paths, and never spoke.

When she had come again to the door, the King searched eagerly in her face for some sign of great joy, but it was not there—only a look of wonderment.

"At last," he cried. "Look here"—forgetting that she could not see. So led her to the church.

Over the door a sweet-faced Madonna was carved, holding the Holy Child.

Miriam ran her hand along the wall and felt, new-carved, in easy reach, the sculptured figures.

"I am lost," she said, in a whisper.

Then he explained. All as she had described from her imagination was made solid, proved, no longer a pale dream; here was everything, and more than she had ever thought of ; here was her garden, house, church.

With a low wailing cry she sat down on the step of the church and cried—

"It is not mine; all my familiar sounds, and scents, and places—they are gone. My kingdom is utterly destroyed! You, who have done all this, you, who professed to understand, do you stand there laughing?

Two dreams were broken on the wheel at once.

Her kingdom, finely imagined; known to her by every crack within the rotten walls of that old refuse-hole; loved by her through all its horrid odours; seen by her through all her blindness, was perished in this new affair.

His dream was gone, for dreams are but frail things despite their strength; his beautiful idea was shattered; all the trouble he had been at to reproduce the picture on her brain, was lost.

"Mine was a finer place than this," she cried. "This paltry place of smooth new buildings has nothing grand for me. Oh! if you might have seen the kingdom that I pictured in my mind—made out of every crevice in the wall, from each uneven stone, or jutting end of beam. The very stones told secrets to me as I walked, where men and women once had walked and worn the stones. Now in this smooth, paved, soulless place, to my

sightless eyes like to a prison, or a bare nunnery, where tired hands make no impression on the walls, my soul is gone from me."

She felt the baby put his soft pink hand up to her, and bent down to him, saying low—

"I thank you, sire, for all your thought; I am not worthy of it, nor are any of us here—Jews; but did you know the anguish at my heart, you would not stay to see the tears steal places in a blind girl's eyes."

Head bowed and body bent, King Peter left the place, and came to where Galeran, his squire, stood with the Lord Constable, waiting.

Here he looked back and saw the girl seated on the step of the church, bent over her child, above her head the stone Madonna in the niche, protecting.

Without speaking any word, Peter, the Constable, and Galeran rode back to the castle.

THE SIXTEENTH YEAR

THE UNBELIEVER

JOHN OF KYME, for certain reasons not pertinent to this present story, had undertaken a pilgrimage to a celebrated shrine in the East.

He parted from the Lady Gertrude, a woman in excellent health, with one daughter of ten, by name Ursula, and left upon his long journey.

For five years Lady Gertrude waited for her husband, and then finding life under such circumstances apparently hollow and monotonous, she fell ill of a quinsy and took no care to live, so died.

For two years Ursula ruled the estate in an idle way, being a dreamy, moody girl, much given to long walks in the woods and over the Kyme hills.

Then, when she was seventeen, John of Kyme came back.

He came back in a snowstorm, and saw his daughter, grown beyond his memory, stand waiting for him, powdered with the white flakes; noticed also that the snow of time had powdered many heads of men who stood about the castle gate.

The Unbeliever

A shadow of the man he once had been, John of Kyme sat upright on his horse, and looked for the first time in seven years on his home.

His eyes were sunken deep, and blazed with feverish light; his face was worn and thin, his skin tanned by wind and sun; across his forehead was a deep scar.

It was afternoon. That morning the news of his wife's death had been brought him by his old steward.

Now he dismounted and went up to his daughter, took her face in his hands, and looked long at her.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Ursula, your daughter," said she, much puzzled.

"Yes, I know that; but now you are something different. When last I looked into your eyes, a child's soul peeped out mischievously; now"—he looked hard at her eyes—"now something—never mind; show me your mother's tomb."

She led him at once to Kyme Church; the people in the streets, waiting to cheer him as he passed, felt strange, and knew not whether 'twas right to cheer a man come back from a holy journey to view a wife's tomb, so they keep silent.

It was quite true about Ursula; she seemed a

wood creature, a nymph, a tree spirit—more than a girl.

There was the tomb in a rich place, well decorated, painted with shields, with an alabaster canopy overhead; the top of it was bare, waiting for the figures that would be placed there when John of Kyme should join his wife.

It was a grim reminder, after his safe arrival home, that Death, who had spared him abroad, in a mysterious way, had been content to sit at home waiting for him.

That night a cart of baggage came, and John of Kyme himself saw to the removal of certain cases; these he caused to be placed in his own private room.

To this room Ursula went on her way to bed, and, finding the door open, she went in.

Her father was seated surrounded with sheets of closely written vellum, old worn books, and other objects. One was a curious censer, one a row of beads; three panels, rarely painted, also; while from the boxes a waterfall of books fell in disorder on the floor.

He was apparently reading three books at once, as three lay open side by side upon a table on which

he propped his elbows. One hand cupped his chin, the other tapped on his forehead.

"Good night," said Ursula.

John of Kyme looked up, and then put up a hand as if to guard himself, then fixed his eyes on her and smiled.

"Good night, daughter," he said, and became buried in his books again.

She stood looking at him for a moment, then turned and left the room quietly.

For days together John sat brooding in his room, so different from the active man he had once been; he talked queerly to himself, and was often seen by men at night pacing the topmost turret of the castle, waving his arms and uttering groans and cries.

One day he called his daughter to him in his room, bade her close the door, and then sit at his feet upon a little stool.

"Ursula," he said, "we must leave here; I am over-disturbed, and the people notice it. They think me mad, who shall be soon a hundred times more sane than any of them. Listen. When I was on my travels in the East, I met some men—no, I will tell it in a different way. One night, when the dusky dome of heaven shone with stars, I lay awake beside

a well, wrapped in my cloak. Out of the night four men came, seemed not to notice me, and sat them down and talked.

"I strained my ears to listen. One was a Christian—so I gathered—one a Jew, one a learned Greek, and one, a strange, dark man, from the Far East.

"All talked of God, except the Greek, who spoke of many gods—gods of water and air, gods of trees and mountains, gods of love and hate, of thunder, and of peace.

"The Eastern man spoke of some Great Spirit leavening all, and spoke also of wine as a strange factor made for us.

"The Jew spoke of Jehovah, strong and mighty, and of a Messiah.

"The Christian spoke of the God of Love and Pity and of the Son of Man.

"As they each spoke in turn, I seemed to agree with each.

"I was persuaded first that the Greek was right. 'Rivers,' he said, 'have souls. Are not some trees melancholy and some gay? are not fields playful and hills sad?'

"Nature it was he voiced, Nature in every mood; God in everything. And as I lay there the desert

seemed to breathe, the trees above me sighed, and the stars looked friendly.

"Then I leant in my mind to the Eastern man who spoke of Fate. 'Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die,' he said, meaning to say also that we die and are not; that we crumble into earth, and that is all. As he spoke I felt the cup of the sky wrap me up. I felt the weight of life lifted from me, and all things passed away in the last thing. I must flicker here like some thin candle—puff, and I am gone for ever.

"The Jew spoke, and I felt moved again. I seemed to feel the reason of his speech. A great Messiah coming like a King, to free mankind from all its load of sin; a Saviour and a Leader of men. I felt the night grow richer for his thought, and felt that hope was stirring in my heart.

"The Christian talked, and told the tale we know so well; a tale, in truth, of the agony of Love and the trial of Faith—the only story with a woman in it. But he also talked of hell and judgment, so I felt the deeds of youth creep up and stand beside me, silent sentinels of long-forgotten sins. I was afraid."

"Father," said Ursula, "all this is some dream."

"My child," said John of Kyme, "I do not know

but in part. I stirred, and there addressed the company of men, saying to them: 'What is the end of this; what is the final thing; which of you is right—what must I do?'

"At that the figures rose and turned their faces to me. They were all pale, except the Eastern man; he stood a head above them all. Thus they regarded me with bright eyes, searching my soul, and never spoke a word. I called to them again, roused up, and sought to touch them. Then I woke."

"Father, what does all this mean?" said the girl.

"It means, my child, that it is given to me to blend these things in one—so shall the world be happy. I will make a new idea; I will form a religion where no doubt is, that all the world shall see at once, believe in instantly, follow. . . . There, go to bed, for by daybreak you must be ready to start."

"Start! To what place?"

"I have it in my mind to go to that island lying off our shore, the Island of the Pines, where a ruined chapel stands; there I will make my church. We start at dawn. Good night."

She left him quickly, and went up into her room.

The doubts that assailed her were crowded out of her mind by loyalty to her father. In part she understood him and his troubles. She herself had felt the power of the earth, the pang of fate, the power of Jehovah, the terror of hell—all, in her childish way, half realized. Now, when her father voiced her many fears, they seemed more real to her and nearer than before.

At dawn they started, no servants with them, not a soul to help her, if she needed help.

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The King was sitting in the council-room, when some one said, "The daughter of Lord John of Kyme."

He looked up, tapping his riding-boots with a thin switch, annoyed a little that any one should seek audience so late, for he was just about to fly a new hawk, and even now his horse waited for him.

A girl stood before him in a tattered frock, her hair ill-bound in the wimple she wore, so that stray curls peered out and fringed her face.

There was a look of terror in her eyes that made the boy start at once.

"What may I do for you, Lady Ursula?" he asked.

She looked round, like a hunted, frightened thing.

"Oh, sire!" she said, in a low, tremulous voice, "I am in sore distress. My father has gone mad and taken me these six long months into a desolate place — the Island of the Pines, by Kyme."

"But, girl, girl—John of Kyme mad! He is but just returned from a holy pilgrimage."

"That is it, sire. This same pilgrimage has caused us all this business. One day he thinks he is a god; another, some great priest; another, just a wanton drinker. Oh! I cannot explain. But now he tears his hair, and calls at night in awful dreams that he will end his life. Help me! help me, oh my lord!"

She fell, half fainting, at his feet, and beat the table with her hands.

The boy, put to it to be a man before his time, tapped nervously at his long boot, and eyed the girl pitifully.

"Only you, sire," she cried, "can save him. In his sane moments he remembers you, his King, and how he has fought; then—what was that?" She started up, her face drawn and white with terror.

"Nothing but the guard about the door," he said.

A low wailing cry came from her.

"Save him," she said, "save him and me, for I am frightened. Oh! oh! I fear."

"How did you come here?" he asked, rising.

"I came by night," she said, "and travelled hurriedly. One of his deep sleeps is on him now. I must go back—but you will come?"

The King called out, and the captain of the guard entered.

"Call me the Father Abbot," said Peter, "and bid him come hot foot. No, say I will come to him."

The man withdrew.

"Lady Ursula," said Peter, "can you calm yourself and go with me to the good father? He will advise us. I am but a boy, and do not know what I can do, but I will willingly come with you."

"Oh, God save you, dear, dear sir," she said; then calmed herself, trying to smooth her tattered clothes, to be more fit to see the Abbot.

The Abbot, a kindly man, old and stout, received them, and heard the girl again pour forth her tale.

"We go now," he said. "I will go with you, and see if, when your father sees the King and knows him, he will listen to me, who knew him as a boy."

The Abbot sighed; he knew the storm of distress that holds such men.

As soon as they might, they rode away, and reached Kyme by night, where the old Abbot would fain have stopped, being weary after the long ride, but the girl implored him, knelt to him, begged him not to delay.

"If only we can get my father home," she said, "then I will tend him, oh, so carefully, and nurse him back to his reason."

It was pitiful to see how she leant on her frail strength.

They took eight men with them, and, in the moonlight, rowed over the strip of sea to the island.

Against the star-splashed sky it stood up stern and grim, covered with pines, whose uncanny shapes showed like a gaunt regiment of gnarled and twisted giants.

They came to where there was a sandy beach, where the moon laughed ripplingly upon the waves, and patched the dark rocks with elfin light.

The boat grated on the sand, and the men leapt out of her, pulled her up, and helped the girl out; the King and the Abbot following.

Lady Ursula led them by a narrow winding path among the trees, and then she bade them stop.

Certain of the men, four of them, stayed by the boat—the others waited in the wood.

She crept forward and left the wood behind, crossed a grassy spot, a graveyard, and came softly, like a quaint wood-sprite, to the ruined chapel.

The King stood trying to pierce the darkness of the wood with his eyes. The Abbot said his beads, and the men waited silently.

Presently the girl came back with a wild look upon her face.

"Come," she whispered, and the King and the Abbot followed her.

They came on to the grassy place where the moon had free play for shadow fancy, and made weird pictures of the pines upon the grass. On to the chapel; there she stopped them with a gesture, looked in by a low window, came to them and whispered—

"Now you may see."

They went to the window and looked in.

The moonlight struggled into the place through the tileless roof, through unglazed windows, and cast a fantasy of shadows on the floor, where grew nettles and grass between the stones.

By the altar the ground was cleared, and here were rushes strewn.

At the altar sat John of Kyme in a long white cloak. There were seven candles on the altar, and these showed, blurred and mistily, the strange wild scene.

Propped on the stone of the altar were the three panels John of Kyme had brought from the East. One showed but a tree and a river ; another, a God of Thunder riding on a cloud, lightning in his hand; the third was an overturned cup of wine; beside these there was a crucifix leant against the wall.

John of Kyme was seated on a block of wood, books all about him. In front of him some bread and meat and wine, placed on the altar. He sat, book in hand, and fed himself.

Suddenly he called out, "Ursula! Ursula! I have found it!" then a groan—"Oh, it is gone from me. Ursula!"

She called to him, "Father."

There was that in her voice which made him start up and crash a candle to the ground.

"If you be God, or man, or god-man, or devil, stand forth!" he cried.

The Abbot and the King went to a door which stood ajar, and entered, Ursula behind them.

"Oh, Powers of Darkness," cried the madman, "what is this?"

The Abbot stepped forward. "Peace, my son," he said, and lifted up a hand to bless.

John of Kyme stood straight up, and then said—

"Why are you come, Great Spirit? Am I wrong, is my poor head ablaze with fantasies? Am I to die now, or am I dead and utterly gone out?"

Peter stepped into the ring of light.

"What new spirit is this?" said John of Kyme. "I know," he shrieked, "John the Divine, the gentle saint. Oh, brain, turn round and clear thyself. I cannot tell who you may be but he. Are you two—God of all!—are you two spirits from two different worlds, with two diverse ideas, come here to mock me?"

His voice grew calmer. Then he walked past them into the grassy place. They followed him.

He stopped and saw them and his daughter also.

"A third!" he cried, "a spirit of the earth! Oh, tell me, in my agony, what you three ghosts do want with John of Kyme. A ghost of the Great Spirit, a ghost of John, a ghost of Earth. Are you some creatures of my brain, tricked out in foul deceit, or are you real, or are you in good truth all the religions of the world in spirit? Oh, tell me, tell me—for God's sake, speak."

Unconsciously he used the God he had forsaken to swear by now.

The Abbot spoke. "John of Kyme, you know me, Father Arthur."

Suddenly John of Kyme held out his hand with a dagger in it; his face, lit by the bright moon, showed like a dead man's face against the white cloak.

"I will find out," he cried, and made as if to strike himself.

Ursula and the King ran forward, and the King got quickly behind John of Kyme and put his arm round the man's neck, jerking his legs from under him with his right knee, so that he fell heavily. Ursula snatched the dagger from his hand.

"Father!" she called.

"Away, damned water-witch!" he said; then to the King, "I thought you were a gentle saint, a kind apostle. Now is my head resting on your bosom, and you should remember how you laid your head on His bosom."

"O God," the Abbot said, "end this tragedy, and help us with Thy holy peace."

Meanwhile John of Kyme began to struggle and to shout hoarsely under the King's grip. "Leave me, I will go to hell, or earth, or nothingness alone. Oh, you are Saint John; where is that Great Spirit? Leave me, awful earth sprite."

"Call the men," said the King, husky with the strain; "call them quickly."

The girl ran to do his bidding.

They rolled about on the grass, the King and John of Kyme, until the men came up. As they came the man ceased struggling and became apparently sane.

"The King!" he said. "Have mercy on me; and you, Father Arthur—and Ursula. Where am I?"

It was pitiful to see him try for his reason.

They coaxed him to the boat, he going like a dazed man, now and again exclaiming, "The King! How come you here?' Then, "Ursula, where am I?"

They got him into the boat and pushed her off into water ; then as the full moon played upon them strongly, just when they were half-way between the shores, John of Kyme became restless and moaned, and then called out on strange gods, with wild oaths.

The men ceased rowing and watched him, thinking they rowed one possessed of a devil, which, in a way, was true.

John addressed them in his great deep voice, which carried right over the water to the watchers on the other shore.

"Men of hell, where do you carry me? Is this Styx, that strange water which the souls pass over? Is this the end? Who is my God? Are you, indeed, the sweet Saint John, the much-loved saint? Are you——? Look!" he cried. "Oh God! take them away. There come the four strange figures walking on the water : the Jew, the Greek, the Eastern man with the brown face, the Christian—— Speak to me!"

He stretched out his hands to the empty night, stood up in the boat, and before any one could raise a hand, he had plunged over the side, and never rose again.

When the boat touched the opposite shore, the King lifted the unconscious Ursula out of the boat, and carried her to some woman there.

"Take care of my well-beloved sister," he said, and after he ever called her by this name.

THE SEVENTEENTH YEAR

THE MILK OF HUMAN KINDNESS

"IT is not Love who is blind, but the lovers who are short-sighted through rose-coloured spectacles.

"Also a boy's first love is foolish and soon over; his second love is enormous, passionate, laughable, but earnest; his third love ought to be his last. But the world wags on, and makes merry at matings, waxes tearful at weddings—heaven knows why—and is dully uninterested in christenings."

So said Toby the Fool.

Said the King, "My dear good Fool, you say what you never believe, and you believe what you dare not say. As for love—flip!" He jerked his fingers in the air.

Having said this in the proud manner of his youth, Peter walked away over the downs to a hill farm, and straightway fell in love. The which seems a bald statement, but what is so bald as boy?

Apart from this, a maid and a dairy, a fine com-

plexion, and an April day—all together, are the very devil.

The poets are right, despite their hyacinth locks; the world's pulse beats in April to the maddest, merriest tune. Lord! look at the lambs! What piper plays for them? If you knew it, cupids hide in every budding hedgerow.

The April sky, for instance, half laughter and half tears; sunny and sullen, mischievous and mad. It's a bad time for proud boys and pretty girls, yet it's a good time. Let us try to be serious.

Peter walked, breasting the wind, and filled his being, if he had only known it, with the devil-may-care spirit of April.

Cecily, the milkmaid, sang at her work, and hoped, without knowing it, that boys would be boys.

Peter strolled up by the hill farm with a primrose stalk between his lips, heart-whole, but bursting with undefined longings.

The scudding clouds chased each other over the blue sky.

The dairy stood a little away from the farm buildings; it shone white and merry in the sun, and the mud nests of last year's martins, dotted under the gutter of the roof, broke the stern line of the building.

A long window gave on to the paddock, where Peter stood, listening.

He could hear Cecily slapping and patting butter on a board, and singing to herself.

Now Cecily did not know the King by sight, but he knew her.

Dame Nature was busy sowing her spring gown; the air was charged with promise; the world went on with its work; but boys were going to be boys.

The farmer, that very morning, had called his wife "my rib" ten times in succession, and she had called him a "great hulk," with evident enjoyment.

Blow wind, blow; all the world's young in April, and if it isn't it ought to be.

On to the dance, then, and the devil catch the hindermost.

Out of the dairy window came the song, accompanied by the slaps of the butter on the board.

"The modest daisy at her feet,
The violet with perfume sweet,
The paramor, the gilliflower,
Did make a dearly pretty bower;
But presently she heft a sigh,
'Was ever such a maid as I,
With flowers for couch and trees above,
But never any one to love?'"

Slap! slap!

Peter could hear her trotting over the brick floor on her wooden clogs, hear her skirts brush against the wooden milk-pails.

The next few lines of the song were drowned in the gush of milk poured from one vessel to another. Then, after a while, the slap of the butter began again.

"I wist she knew that he was there,
Else she'd no bin so debonaire.
I wot she had not told her fears
For only flowers' or birdies' ears."

Slap went the butter.

Peter the King felt his blood rising to his cheeks, and thought it was the April wind.

So it was; the April wind is charged with more things than dust and flying leaves and bits of straw.

"She feigned he took her by surprise,
Although she happed so nice and meek
He saw the rudde upon her cheek."

Cecily came to the window and threw out some water from a wooden bowl—saw the King standing there, and cried—

"Lord have mercy on us, boy, you scared me out of my life!"

Peter stood awkwardly looking at her, she was so

fresh and pretty; pert, like a bird, and merry as the month.

"Now, gowk!" she said, "what ails you? La! what's the matter, all-eyes?"

"Oh! I was passing."

"La! then you're free to pass," she laughed, and drew her head back into the room.

Most unsatisfactory.

Something seemed to have dulled Peter's brain, he felt so hopeless.

The head came out of the window again.

"Still there, moonstruck?"

On a sudden a happy inspiration came to Peter.

"Could I have a bowl of milk?" he asked.

It is most uncomfortable to feel the hot blood on the cheeks, know that it is the wind, and fear that it might be mistaken—for what? Pan, Venus, Cupid, answer me this question.

"Very well," she said, and trotted away to fetch it.

How his heart beat till she came to the window again.

"Here you are, pretty boy!" Pretty boy, indeed —what indignity!

"I thank you, pretty girl," he said, and the blush deepened on his cheek.

She tossed her head, so that the stray curls danced.

"Who taught you to make pretty speeches?" she said.

Heavens above! Who did, indeed? It's a secret —and it isn't. Kittens catch mice as soon as they dare, and birds—well, look at the young cockerel in the farmyard airing his paltry plumage and eyeing his prospective wives.

He took the bowl, and as he raised it to his lips he looked across at her. She leant her elbows on the window-sill, and smiled at him. Boys will be boys, but girls seem to be women and practised in the arts of love when they are only in the cradle. It takes a boy seventeen years to learn to worship, and it takes a girl seventeen months to know that she ought to be worshipped and adored. From that hour to the end of her life she insists upon it. So she ought.

Boys make men smile, but girls make angels laugh.

"I'm looking for a young man," said she.

The milk splashed Peter's tunic.

"How would I suit?" he asked, astonished at himself.

"Not tall enough," she answered. He was

tall, and straight, and fair. What could she want?

"No," she said, "not nearly tall enough for what I need."

"What do you need your man for?" Peter asked.

"To reach me down the moon," she said; "all women want the moon."

"That's an idle wish," Peter replied, and came a step nearer on the grass.

"Idle!" said she, "idle! Makes me think I must get about my work."

"Oh, don't go in," he said.

"I'm not out, silly boy. Half out is half in, and the safest place for girls."

Peter came a step nearer to the window; he was not far off now.

It is not often kings may walk about unknown and talk with milkmaids; when it does come about, let kings take heed lest kingdoms totter, and kingships seem a hard affair.

"What is your name?" asked Peter.

"Ah!" she said, "that's telling."

"I'm sure it's a pretty name," he said.

"Certain-sure killed a crow," said the girl, "fooled a fowler, and made a bad pie."

"I'm no fowler, so that I shan't be fooled. Give me three guesses."

He was safe because he knew her name already. Is the beginning of love always the beginning of deceit?

"Guess away, sir," said the milkmaid.

"For a prize?" he suggested. How does the devilish ingenuity of Cupid creep in just at the right moment? Well, this isn't a question of morals.

Now he was standing by the window leaning against the wall. Mind you, one cannot help these situations. Wink your eye, and swallow your text-books—it's April.

"Hum!" she said, her head on one side, "what prize? The rogue!"

For all his new-born bravery he dared not say.

"Guess away, sir, we shall settle that afterwards." She felt certain and safe that he would not guess aright. There's the use of proverbs. "Certain-sure killed a crow," why didn't she remember that?

"Alice."

"Wrong."

"Emily."

"Wrong again. Now for the last."

"Cecily," he said, triumphant, but his new

deceit failed him, for his voice showed that he had known all the time.

Being beaten she affected not to notice it.

"Of course you knew," she said in a haughty way.

"There was talk of a prize," he suggested.

"I must get to my work," she replied, turning away.

Stupid boy, he didn't know what was expected from him.

Cecily went back to her work, and Peter could hear her scrubbing something in the cool dim light of the dairy.

"Cecily," he said. No answer.

"Cecily."

"Go away, boy."

"Cecily, I've a most amusing story for your ear."

"Keep it for your own," she replied; but the noise of scrubbing ceased.

She smiled to herself, this merry maid, because, being twenty-two, she knew April's breath, and loved it well.

"If I were not a boy, you then might——"

"Oh!" said she, popping her head again to the window, "that's the way the wind blows, is it?"

He nearly felt hurt.

"Now, if you were the King," she said, "it might be different."

Sometimes we come nearer to the truth by accident than by design. Heavens! platitudes in April! At any rate it gave an edge to the situation.

The King knew that he must not, but he itched to scorch his fingers—which last is a neat sentence, only to be followed by those who know love's alphabet.

She was a cuddlesome thing, framed by the window; neat, pretty. . . . Peter leaned towards her.

She turned a quarter of her face to him—a rosy field waiting to be planted with harmless kisses. Harmless kisses—I wonder if that is a contradiction?

Still he hesitated, and while he waited she repented—repented, no—thought he was hopeless.

Again she thought to try him, he looked so pleasant, so boyish.

She turned, and went to her work, while he remained outside, leaning on the window-sill by now.

Suddenly she called, "Oh! oh! come, help! help!"

In a moment he was through the window—love's front door.

"I have a fly in my eye; get it out for me, quickly."

He came up to her where she stood, her hand over her eye. In the cool light of the dairy she looked prettier than ever. Peter imagined that his heart beat so loud that she must hear it. The artful rogue put up her face quite close to his and showed one eye closed—April's crest.

He stood nervous for a moment, then, with his neat hands he tried his best; put one under her chin, one to her eye, and with his fingers pushed the lid softly up. There was no fly.

At once he saw the whole idea, blushed crimson, thought, then planted a fair kiss upon her cheek.

"Goody me!" she said, "I thought you'd never do it."

The King stood there awkwardly, crimson to the roots of his hair; his brown cloak fallen from his shoulders showed his rich dress, his jewelled dagger-hilt.

As fortune had it, no distinguishing mark was on his clothes, no crest or monogram, no badge hung on the chain about his neck.

She stood away from him, arms out, hands on hips.

"Kissed by a lordling—well, might be worse." So little did she guess.

Laughter saved them both from sentiment, as it often does.

"Now, high and mighty, perch yourself on the table while I brisk up and swab the floor," she said.

Nimbly he leapt upon the table and sat swinging his legs.

To Peter the kiss was a great action, wonderfully done. He was as proud of himself as if he was the first in the world who had ever kissed a milk-maid in April.

It is of no use saying what she felt, because—secrets! April's full of secrets.

As he sat and swung his legs his shyness left him, and he talked.

How does one talk in April? All the world's a hint in April, not a rich fulfilment, as it is in June; not a sleepy dream, as it is in August; not a ripe mellowness, as it is in September; nor crisp delight, as it is at Christmas; not a tucked bride, as it is in March, waiting to become a mother; it's a hint, a pale primrose thing, a faint green affair, a place of delicate suggestion.

Married in April, born in May, lived in June,

wise in August, shorn in September, buried at Christmas, born again in May—that's the world.

Peter talked, Cecily swabbed the floor and listened when she thought she would. That didn't matter; boys don't want listeners, they want to talk. And, like a boy, he talked about the things which interested him, and not of those which might amuse the girl. Hawking! His horses! His skill with the bow!

Still she never guessed.

As he talked the thought of the kiss heartened him, and now that he was free of the orchard he wanted another plum.

"Cecily."

"Well, pert."

"Cecily, I have a secret for your ear."

"It's here."

"Bring it nearer."

She knew, the roguish maid—she knew and smiled.

"It's near enough for your secrets," she said.

"But this is most particular," he urged.

She took her hand from the swabbing-brush and shook a finger at him.

Peter was about to jump from the table when she sent a pail of water swilling on the floor, so that he drew his feet back quickly.

"It is wrong," she said, with mock gravity, "for boys to have any secrets, very wrong and wicked."

She came, avoiding the pools of water with her clogs, and stood by the table, temptingly near.

With a quick movement he slipped his arm round her plump waist and kissed her cheek again.

Did he take her by surprise? Did he—— Oh April wind and April skies!

The brief enjoyment of his gallantry was snatched from him in a moment, because Cecily, dropping the swabbing-brush, boxed his ears.

Her airy laughter rang out and echoed in the place, stopped suddenly; the door opened, and her father entered.

The King, hurt, wounded in his pride, stood up at once.

The farmer looked at them, looked again, open-mouthed, at the King, then dropped on one knee on the wet floor.

"Your Majesty's humble servant," he said, then he rose.

"Oh, goody," said the milkmaid, "and I've just boxed his ears!"

"Cecily," roared the farmer, "ye shameful hussy."

"Good man, let me explain," Peter said quickly,

his eyes now twinkling. "She only thought to kill a wasp upon my cheek."

"Oh!" from Cecily.

The farmer looked from one to the other, and a faint smile hovered about his lips.

"And for her prompt action," Peter continued, "I wish to reward the maid with this"—he looked about his person for a gift, and saw the chain about his neck—"this chain, as a small token of my gratitude."

He removed the chain from his neck, and beckoned the girl to him. She came near and dropped a curtsey. As he put the chain about her neck he winked.

Spring's heraldry—a field of green, charged with primroses in gold; for crest, an eye half closed; supporters, lambs; motto, "Boys will be boys."

THE EIGHTEENTH YEAR

THE COARSENESS OF VIRTUE

HE was called Perkin, and she Lettice.

He was a sour-faced, ill-natured man of forty; she was nineteen; ripe, rich-coloured, modest.

Perkin was a merchant of good repute in his trade, but disliked by all in his person; a canting fellow, for ever talking of vice and wickedness to prove it bad, loving to roll texts on his tongue, and spit them forth maliciously.

Lettice was of a poor family—so he reminded her twenty times a day. Lettice was pretty—so he spoke of her as a green bay tree. Lettice was joyful—he threatened her with Judgment Day. She sang—he bade her weep for her sins. He filled his paunch with good food, and questioned that she ate too heartily. He beamed on her in public and scowled at her in private; said "Poppet" in the market-place, and "Good-for-nothing" in the shop.

Lettice had no friends and no companions but a

stern old woman who sulked through the housework—moreover the old hag was dumb.

One day Perkin brought a handsome youth into the shop, and told Lettice that he had taken this young man as a partner in his business. She humbly curtseyed to the youth, and hung her head like a dog who fears the whip.

The youth looked at her kindly, and then was hurried off by Perkin to pore over ledgers and accounts.

By degrees Master Perkin left his work at home to the care of the youth, who was called Edward, and strove to increase his prosperity by travelling over the country for orders.

The surly brute was wont to clothe himself in a long, fur-lined gown, mount on his horse, throw a moral to his wife as if he gave a bone to a dog, nod curtly to Edward, and ride away.

Soon the neighbours began to talk, as if they had some share in a poet's licence.

Perkin the merchant never heard a word of the gossip, naturally, since he was away half the week, and twisting the Bible into maledictions the other half.

Edward and Lettice heard nothing but each other's sighs.

The Coarseness of Virtue

Next door to the merchant lived a man and his wife, who made leathern shoes, long shoes, the ends of which were stuffed with moss to stiffen them. These shoes were hung outside the shop-door on a string, and they made in this way a sort of screen. Behind this screen the woman sat in the shop-door day after day, burning patterns on the finished shoes with a hot iron, a little brazier at her side by which to heat the iron.

Edward and Lettice seeing that the sulky house-woman was dumb, broke their sighing silence and fell into tender words. The woman was horrified to hear their talk, but, as they well knew, she could not voice her disapproval. They calculated without the woman next door, who heard a great deal more than was safe. However, she was a kind enough woman in her way, and kept her peace.

One day Perkin was standing at his door scowling at the people who passed by. It was a hot summer day, and he had taken off his heavy gown and stood there in a short tunic, for lightness and comfort.

"Curse your stinking leather," he said to the woman next door, "and curse your filthy brazier with its hot smell. To curse in a good cause is right —witness the older prophets."

This so annoyed the woman that she cast about for some sharp answer, and finding none, was about to silently continue patterning her shoes. She took the hot iron out of the brazier, and the devil turned her attention to the fat calf of Master Perkin, neatly cased in wool hose, which showed under the string of shoes. Her blood boiled, and she jabbed the hot iron into his calf.

Such a yell rent the air that all the people came running out of their houses to see what the trouble might be.

There stood Master Perkin hopping about on one foot, holding his burnt leg in both hands, and roaring like a bull.

"The witch!" he yelled. "Burn her, duck her, murder her!"

Now the woman had just a moment, before the people came, to hide the iron and pull out a bundle of moss, so that when they arrived she was peacefully stuffing a long-toed shoe.

A group of people gathered about Perkin's door and asked him what was the matter.

"Matter!" he cried, still hopping and squirming with the pain, "ask the foul hag there."

"What have I done?" she said.

"You — you venomous spawn of the devil,

you ran your hot iron into the flesh of my leg."

She looked innocently at the people, and showed her hand full of moss.

Now the merchant was hated by every one in the street, and a certain man spoke up for the rest—

"See, master, this must have been some dream, or else some devil's play; old Martha here has but a handful of moss and a shoe near to her; 'twas never her."

"Devil's play it might be, but dream, oh!" said Perkin.

He was a superstitious man, and this had some effect with him; moreover he saw that the people were against him, so he kept silent, contenting himself with shaking his fist at the woman.

He hobbled to the door and met Lettice, his wife.

"So this is the way you look after your husband. Am I good to you? Do I feed you? Have I wed you, eh, fool?"

She shrank from him.

"Come, woman, bind up my leg, and think on hell and damnation for your sins of omission while you do it—oh!"

"You are hurt, Perkin."

"Hurt, Perkin. Hear the silly creature! Hurt! Sick to death, and when I die, you'll die of grief—likely? Ah, God!"

"I am so sorry, Perkin."

"Sorry! Why there's many a woman in this town would be glad to have the right to be sad for me; d'ye hear that?"

"Yes, Perkin."

"Well, swallow it well, and sleep on it, and digest it; fetch rags and oil, and be some little use."

All the next day, when he sat grumbling, with his leg on a chair to ease it, he thought of some plan to pay out the shoemaker's wife, and she tried to think of some safe way to pacify him, now that she was frightened at her deed.

It happened that the King sent invitations for a great banquet, to which, among many others, the merchant Perkin and his wife were bidden, and the shoemaker and his wife also.

It was a feast to the tradesmen of the town, advised by the Lord Constable.

The great hall was filled with people; the trestle-tables ran in long lines from end to end, from the dais, where the King and nobles dined, to the door.

There was a hubbub and a clatter—a hum of talk and peals of laughter from the guests.

As it chanced, the shoemaker's wife sat next to Perkin; on the other side of him his wife, by her side Edward.

Here was an opportunity for the shoemaker's wife to make her peace with Perkin.

When the merchant was well stuffed with food and wine, she leant to him and told him quietly the scandal about his wife, not so quietly but Lettice heard it.

Up started Perkin, red in the face and furious, forgot where he was, forgot the presence of the King.

"Look at this trollop!" he cried, "she-cat—devil—Jezebel! Look at her well, neighbours; the evil thing who steals into my house without a penny, and uses it for her foul practices. And see this man, companion of her shame, whom I took in and fed."

The King heard the disturbance at the far end of the hall, and asked what it meant.

"Nothing, sire," said the Constable, "a mere vulgar brawl from that brazen-mouthed merchant."

So saying he sent men to silence him.

Meanwhile the women about Lettice cried,

"Shame on you, girl," and other things more foul.

Those who are nearest to a sin swear best against it.

Lettice rose, pale and trembling, and made her way unsteadily out of the hall. Edward sat where he was. The men pushed the merchant, and forced him to sit down. Then he spoke to Edward—

"Well, is this true?"

Asking after his accusation—like the man.

Edward denied it stoutly, because it was only in part true. He had kissed the girl to comfort her, and spoken words of love to her, and she to him. Further he had thought, but never dared. He had dreamed evil, but she was without a speck of real sin, so he was the truer sinner.

The banquet over, the people dispersed to their houses.

It was now evening.

Peter the King went into his garden for the air, and heard, on the other side of a small door in the orchard wall, a girl sobbing.

He opened the door and went out. It was dark in the lane, and only the stars shone out.

When he touched the girl on the shoulder she

started back fearfully, and he saw that she was the girl who had caused the disturbance at the banquet.

She choked her sobs, and turned to go away.

"Can I do nothing for you, girl?" he asked.

"No, sire, no," she replied, in a low voice.

"Tell me your trouble," he said kindly.

She broke out into her passionate weeping afresh.

"Come, tell me," he said, taking one of her hands.

"My husband," she said, "has shut me out from our house."

"Why so?"

"Oh, sire, may I tell you? Because some evil dame has told half truth about me. I hate my husband, he is cruel to me. I was a pure, innocent girl, until he taught me wrong in his vile way. Day after day he talked of sin, told me all manner of sins in vivid language, bidding me never to do what I knew not before existed. Taught me vile words, and told me not to use them. In the end he brought a man to our house who was kind. I fell in love with him, and he with me; was that wrong? But we only kissed and sighed; was that wrong? What is wrong, sire? I could not help my love. Still, if I was not true to my cruel

husband, by my speech, I never wronged him otherwise. Now he has driven me from home, and no one will take me in."

Now the King, in the hot blood of his youth, thought he would mend matters speedily. He took the girl in by the garden way and to the kitchens. There he told the maids to care for her by his express command.

Peter then went, just as he was, in his long-skirted houppelande, down the street where Master Perkin lived.

The doors were closed along the street, the windows showed no sign of light. He knew the shop by the sign of the woolpack hung outside. Finding the door barred, he knocked lustily.

Soon he heard the window overhead being opened, looked up, and saw a tousled head thrust out.

In the dark street the King, in his long-skirted garment, looked like a woman.

Out of the window came a flow of jumbled words. Texts, curses, filthy abuse.

"Stand there!" cried Perkin, "stand there all night and beg for mercy—I will not let you in. Have I so long nourished a serpent at my breast? I care not what you did, 'tis what you willed to do

grieves me. Oh, may the Lord spit at you from heaven, and the devil cast you from hell when you die, so that you may creep, a wailing spirit, back to earth, to this same house you've fouled. Let your evil kisses burn into your flesh like living fires. May you rot and run with dreadful sores, and crawl with fearful pestilence, walking from street to street to beg your bread. Shall my fair name be linked to yours in shame, you filthy hag? Begone!" The window was slammed and shut fast.

Much more than this the merchant Perkin said. A vast array of texts culled from sermons, in which all love, hope, pity, charity, and truth were ruthlessly torn out. Only the curses in the Bible seemed to come flowing from his lips. And why? Because of his coarse virtue, often worse than vice; his narrow mind knew not the beauty of great love and charity; because the cloak of virtue that he had assumed choked him, and allowed none of the pure fount of gentleness to flow.

As the King walked through the streets back to the castle all his thoughts were turned on the affair, and this is how he put it to himself—

"Virtue becomes a man who keeps it as a grace, not as a taunt. Here is a brutal fellow crushes his girl-wife into an evil state, making her think her



way to keep it brigl
not commit up to pı
a glory of his refrain
loud against the powe
the gates of heaven
is the girl, his wife,
even a little kindness.
taking what she may.
kind man but a cowar
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brute comes in."

Then he thought of
the man. It was a boyi
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In four days' time an

hour after he had publicly abused him, because he could not afford to lose such a good business man. So much for pleasure. The gall to him was that he could not find his wife, nor learn any news whatever about her.

He had thought to do the thing handsomely in public, bring great renown on himself in the character of good-hearted Perkin, who forgave his wife's misdeeds, and he intended, or had intended, to make a fine bombastic speech, full of Biblical allusions to his own magnanimity.

In spite of hunting high and low for any sign or trace of his wife he could not discover anything of her, so he cursed her again, upbraiding her in his mind for neglecting to come back to her loving husband, and went alone to the banquet.

On the way to the castle Perkin met many other merchants and their wives, all of them full of talk as to the meaning of this second banquet.

"To stuff us with meat and then to make us lend some money," said one.

"There's no need to stuff yourself," some one replied.

The shoemaker and his wife passed by.

"Good day, Perkin," they called cheerfully.

He growled "Good day," and walked on.

The hall was arranged as before, the tables running the length of it, from door to dais.

A pewter plate was set before each person, and by the pewter plate a tiny pebble.

Every one looked at the pebble by their plate with great interest; a great deal of joking took place about them. They called them the new meat, they pretended that the savoury meats in front of them were not to be touched, but were only to be looked at.

For a long time they were kept waiting for their meat, because the King had not yet come to his place on the dais.

Everybody anxiously watched the curtains behind the dais, watching for them to be drawn apart, and the King to step forward from between them with a flourish of trumpets.

Certain greedy old dames eyed the succulent messes on the dishes and calculated on the morsels they would snatch.

The company heard the sound of trumpets far off, muffled by the curtains. Then their excitement grew to a tense, greedy pitch. The King was coming along the corridor.

The trumpet sound grew plainer. The men by the curtains stood ready to draw them apart. Then

close by the blare of trumpets sounded, the curtains were drawn apart, and then, to the amazement of all the people, the King entered with Lettice, the merchant Perkin's wife, by his side.

A humming whisper filled the hall as the King and the girl came foward.

The Lord Constable and several knights and ladies looked anxious. The people gazed at the two, not knowing what was going to happen.

Perkin blinked, opened his eyes wide, rubbed them, wondered, sat open-mouthed.

The King arrived at his seat and lifted up his hand.

There was a breathless silence. Then he spoke.

"Let those who curse by texts learn from them. He who is without sin let him cast the first stone."

The silence was broken by a gurgling gasp from Perkin.

Then the King beckoned the girl to a place by his side, and she stood there, white and trembling.

A monk rose, and every one rose. He said a grace in a low, hurried voice.

The people sat down and looked at each other; then some deaf old dame said, in a loud voice—

"Lawky me, what's it all about?"

his wife till his arm achec
So much for poetic just



THE NINETEENTH YEAR

FOOLS STEP IN WHERE ANGELS FEAR TO TREAD

TRUTH sits at every man's door waiting to be asked inside.

The most unlikely persons fall in love.

The fallen leaf is sign of spring promise, not of barren winter.

He who tries to shoot with Cupid's bow often shoots himself.

Never try to arrange any love affairs but your own. If Peter the King had but known this last!

On a crisp October morning, when the stones rang merrily under his feet, Peter started through the town, intending to climb the downs and go seawards.

He passed down a narrow lane on the west side of the town, a lane that ran between garden walls. These gardens joined the backs of some rich merchants' houses. The pathway was full of dead leaves, rich and brown and soft to tread upon, so that, coming from the clattering stones of the

street, he felt at once the silence of this place where his feet made no noise.

As he came nearly to the end of the lane, he heard an angry voice raised in high-pitched tones of temper, and a softer voice answering.

He stepped on and stood, curious, by the half-open garden door, through which the sounds came clear.

"But I do not love this Galeran," the soft voice said.

Galeran! The King perked up his ears.

"Love, addlepate! Who asked you if you love? Love is not for girls, and you will love enough in time. Here am I arranging a most promising match that will set you far above Walter Parkin's daughter, and help me nobly in my matter with the Guild, and off you go prattling about love like a kitchenmaid. Leave love to the servants, you ungrateful girl."

"The gawky stick, I hate him," said the soft voice, raised now in protest.

"A stick, madame, let me tell you, with a good handle. See yourself as Lady Adela de Maunche, and reason a little on that."

"I won't."

"You will."

Then the sound of a slap.

Peter knocked at the garden door, and without waiting for a word, pushed the door open and entered.

There stood Gilbert Wineberry, red in the face, and, shrunk behind a tree, Adela.

Gilbert bowed awkwardly and knelt to kiss the King's hand; Adela knelt also, and the King felt a tear drop on to the hand she kissed.

"Happening by this way," said Peter, "I fear I overheard——"

"Overheard a saucy girl, sire, daring to interfere with her father's most cherished ambitions."

Peter shook his head sagely and looked at the girl. She was very pretty, a fair girl with mouse-coloured hair, soft pink cheeks, and wide grey eyes.

"Here comes the cause of all this trouble," said the merchant, looking crossly at his daughter. "If only Dame Wineberry were a sensible woman she'd give you bread and water till you came to your senses." He turned to the King. "A most unreasonable girl, sire; you will forgive my heat—most unreasonable!"

Galeran, the cause of the trouble, came over the grass towards the group, noticed the King, and wrinkled his forehead.

Peter nearly laughed. Here was the sobersides, Galeran, pricked out in the most gorgeous array, his hair curled and scented, his shoes half a foot longer than usual; carrying a chaplet of flowers in his hand.

Said Peter to the merchant, "Good Master Wineberry, I will settle this affair for you. This Galeran de Maunche is my squire and does my bidding."

"As you will, sire," said Gilbert. "I have given the maid a piece of my mind——"

"Helped out with salutary acts," said Peter.

"And pointed with a sound smack, as you say," said Gilbert. "Well, sire, nothing would please me better if you would knock the heads of the couple together till they see fit to do as I wish."

The merchant strolled off to the house, fretting and fuming.

Adela and Galeran stood about six feet apart from each other, watching the retreating merchant.

"Now attend to me," said the King. "You, Galeran, do you love this girl?"

"My mother wishes it," Galeran replied.

"Poof! dismiss your excellent mother from your thoughts."

He waited.

Galeran toyed nervously with the flowers, his eyes on the ground. Ill at ease he felt in his sumptuous clothes, and worse than ill at ease before the girl.

"I don't care," said Adela, pouting.

The King leant against a tree trunk, and looked from one to the other.

"Well?" he said.

"My father leaves me to go as I will," said Galeran; "my mother makes me do her bidding."

"My mother would not have me wed a man I hated," Adela said; "but my father——" She put her hand to her cheek.

"Your father is a pompous fool," said Galeran, forgetting himself.

"And your mother is a——"

"Hush!" said the King, smiling. "Now, Adela, confess you have some other gallant in your mind's eye."

"Ah!" She clasped her hands rapturously; she came close to the King and said, "Every day a youth passes our garden door and sings to me and I to him. Sometimes he throws a flower to me and I——"

"Return another," said Peter, feeling very proud of his penetration. "Of course," he explained, "I

have never been in love myself; but then——" a wave of the hand.

There was a profound silence.

"And you, my squire," said Peter, "whom do you sigh for? dress for?"—he ran his eye over the preposterous garments—"wait to die for?"

"A certain lady," said Galeran slowly.

"Names," said Peter, "names; and I will put it all level for you both."

"You will?" from Adela, putting a hand on his arm.

Galeran came close to the other side of the King and looked across at Adela. Really, she was very pretty.

Adela affected not to notice him.

"Hubert Choisey," she whispered.

"Hubert," said Galeran, "a pretty fellow, half a head shorter than myself; I beat him with the bow nine points to three."

Adela looked covertly at Galeran. Really, he was very handsome.

"And your fair lady?" asked Peter, enjoying himself immensely.

"Anne of Manners," Galeran said, in a low voice.

"Lady Anne," said Adela, "the girl with the

turned-up nose and a slit of a mouth." She tossed her head.

"You are really, truly, in love with these?" asked Peter.

Neither Adela or Galeran answered for a moment. They were looking at each other.

"Oh yes, I think so," said Adela.

Galeran bowed.

"All shall be arranged as easily as dropping off a wall," said Peter. It was one of Toby the Fool's expressions which he passed as his own.

"To-morrow afternoon you shall both come—together—to my orchard door. I will let you in; there you will meet Hubert Choisey and Lady Anne Manners, so you can settle it yourselves."

"I shall meet my noble Hubert," said Adela, "a man who disdains mere boys' sport for finer arts, and you"—to Galeran—"will see your snub-nosed girl. Oh, sire! how can I thank you?"

"You can thank me best," said Peter, "by remaining here with Galeran and entertaining him, so that your good father and your excellent mother will——"

"Be deceived. Splendid!" cried Adela.

"Not exactly that," said Peter, "be—propitiated."

Galeran held the chaplet out to the girl; she pretended that she did not see the action.

Peter straightened himself and said, "To-morrow, then, at the orchard gate—the afternoon."

They both bent low, and Peter walked quickly to the gate, out into the lane.

"A little care," he said to himself, "a little tact, and those two will fall in love with each other. Now for Hubert and Anne."

Lady Anne of Manners received the King in the presence of her mother, which made things a little awkward, but he managed to convey to her, aside, that she was to be by his orchard gate the next afternoon.

She took it for a meeting designed by him, and was fluttered into dreams of crowns and all manner of royal things.

Hubert he found by accident, buying a pair of gloves and sighing verses to the glove-maker's daughter. He was surprised at the mark of royal favour, and wondered what it meant.

The following afternoon seemed so long in coming to Anne that she thought it never would arrive. It seemed so near to Hubert, who shook in his shoes, wondering if he were about to be upbraided on the matter of the glove-maker's daughter.

To Adela and Galeran—so well had the King's plan worked—it seemed to float gracefully towards them as part of the same sweet day.

Peter ordered that no one of the Court should go near the orchard all that afternoon, went there betimes himself and watched by the door.

Not hearing any approaching footsteps, he went to the door and opened it quickly to look out.

Adela and Galeran nearly fell upon him, being turned from even balance since Galeran had his arm about Adela's waist.

"Oh, sire," said Adela, the first to get her breath, "oh, sire, forgive us both; we found—what did we find, dear one? What did I say?—but, there, you know. We love each other."

"That we do, sire," said Galeran, now altered wonderfully from the sober youth he once was wont to be.

"He is a little stupid," said Adela, holding Galeran's hand, "but I am teaching him. What shall we do now?"

Peter would have enjoyed saying, "Bless you, my children," but felt that he was not yet quite old enough. "Go into the orchard," he said, "and wait for me."

"But Hubert?" said Adela.

"Anne?" said Galeran.

"Leave them to me," Peter replied, now feeling equal to any task of love and match-making.

"Hubert and Anne," he thought to himself, "will make a fine couple. It shall be done."

Adela and Galeran went off among the trees; as they moved away Peter heard footsteps coming up the lane—and voices.

"I will not be followed"—Anne's voice.

"Lady, I must follow, or go before—— I have a reason, Lady Anne; the King would speak with me."

"Speak with you! numskull! bowlegs—you! Out of my way!" Evidently the Lady Anne was seriously annoyed.

At the gate stood the King anxiously waiting, a little upset by the turn of affairs.

"My lord and master," said Lady Anne, curtseying to the ground, and filling the gate with her skirts.

She looked dainty enough, like an almond tree in bloom. Black hair, dark eyes, and almond-flower complexion and firm white teeth, and a smile which would have been a danger-signal to a man of forty, an intoxication to a man of thirty, and was a puzzle to the boy of nineteen.

"Here is a dull wit who says he has a word for you," she said, as Hubert came up.

"It would do me a great service," Peter replied, "if you would entertain him for a while."

He left them, making sure that such a lovely lady would be certain to captivate Hubert. This was the case. Hubert was ready, was always ready, to throw his heart and his immature verse at the feet of any beauty.

"Lady Anne," he said, laying his hand on his heart.

"Begone, idiot!" stamping her small foot, "go away from me and play puppy to your other loves. Do you think I am going to be fooled; made love to by a stupid, ridiculous object? Begone!"

"But, Lady Anne——"

"Yes, idiot! You have my name pat enough—Lady Anne!" she said, mincing and imitating the luckless youth. "Our garden does not join to Alice Henning's for nothing. 'Lady Anne, I am sore at heart, that I must with thee part, it gives me grievous smart'—idiot!"

"But——"

"No buts—off, or in the winking of an eye I will—oh, why are we frail women built in this tender manner? I tell you, if you do not fly, I will

recite to the King, in your presence, certain rhymes, verses, rondels—whatever you call your ridiculous nonsense, as it came to my ears over the garden wall. Now, begone!"

Under this threat, Hubert, crestfallen, miserable, left the garden just as the King came through the trees to Lady Anne.

Before he came up to her she had just time to seat herself gracefully upon a seat and calm her countenance into a bewitching smile.

"But where is Hubert Choisey?" asked Peter.

"We need no prying boys," she said, making room for him by her on the seat.

He stood there dumb. Evidently, thought Lady Anne, this was going to be a difficult affair.

"I suppose," she said, in a low musical voice, "that the ladies of your court have said all the nice things I long to speak but do not dare."

"Nice things! Oh, they are very kind."

"And beautiful," she said, looking at him meltingly.

"I suppose so," he answered. ("Where was the fool Hubert," he thought.)

Nervously he fidgeted with the gloves stuck in his girdle; then he plucked one out and laid it on the seat.

Instantly she pounced upon it and covered it with kisses.

Peter grew very red and uncomfortable. "Those are not Hubert's," he said.

"If they were, should I waste—oh! that is not right from a girl, I know, but what is a girl in love to do?"

"In love with whom?" said Peter.

"Guess," she answered, looking at him so that the blood mounted to his cheek, and he looked round desperately for a means of escape.

"I——" she began.

"There's Toby, my jester," said Peter, breathing again. "You must forgive me, Lady Anne—forgive me if I leave you for one short moment."

"I could forgive you anything," she said.

Peter ran off to catch the jester, and she, with a determined smile, took the glove she had still in her hand and sat down upon it.

Peter found Toby, and came to him in his distress.

"Good fool," he said; then he missed the glove. "Saints above!" he cried. "Listen, Toby. A little kittenish creature, Lady Anne de Manners, is here, in the garden; she's making love to me."

"Ho! ho!" laughed Toby, "here's a sweet game."

"Now she has my glove," said Peter. "Oh, good fool, get it back for me, and send the girl away."

"Thou hast not made a little love thyself, sire, eh?"

"Toby!"

"Well, sire, 'tis safest to make sure; many a man likes to exercise his heart and try its paces ere he make the first leap."

"She waits for me under the tree upon a seat," said Peter.

"Leave her to me," Toby said, "for I am a man urgent in love affairs, and in my time have untied many awkward knots. Tell me, first, the history of this dainty piece of play."

As the King told him Toby's face wreathed in smiles and his eyes twinkled with merriment.

"I will attend to this," he said; "leave the kitten to me, and I will teach her not to catch mice before her time."

The King waited anxiously, walking about the upper garden until Toby returned.

"Well," he cried, when Toby came in sight, waving the glove in the air. "Oh, excellent fool, tell me how you managed her."

"In this way, sire," said Toby. "I went up to the lady where she sat inflating herself with sighs. 'Madame,' I said, 'a fine day.'

"'I have seen finer,' said she.

"'None finer for love-making,' said I.

"'I know nothing of that,' said she.

"'Who does?' I said.

"Then she tapped her foot and looked away. (Lord, it was a sight for the blind!)

"'Now there's a fine fellow,' I said, 'Hubert Choisey.'

"'I do not follow you, fool,' said she.

"'Aye, but he would follow you,' said I.

"'Let him,' said she, 'he'll get his nose pinched.'

"'Lord!' I said, 'and he just received a fortune of money.'

"Then she raised her eyebrows—and I raised the fortune.

"'Oh,' I said, 'a very precious affair of money, a most extraordinary value of it.'

"'Indeed!' she said, in a gentle voice.

"'Indeed,' said I, 'and a poor lone youth, Hubert. I met him a short while ago. "Where do you go?" I asked him. "For lack of better, to the Lady Alice Henning," he answered me.'

"'That mulish, red-headed thief,' said she.

"Then I saw her hand steal under her skirts, so I knew where the glove was hidden. I waited awhile; then I cried out, 'A wasp—take care!'

"Up she sprang, and I seized the glove and hid it in my pouch.

"'Oh, where?' she said, gathering her skirts about her legs and looking round.

"'Gone, sting and all, my lady," I said.

"Then she looked on the seat and missed the glove, looked at me, reddened, threw up her head, and marched to the gate.

"'You fat beast,' she said at the gate.

"'Madam,' I replied, 'any word from your sweet lips is a compliment.' So she went."

"Toby," said the King, "how can I reward you?"

"October, the wise men say, is noted for its ales."

Peter put his hand to his pouch and drew forth a handful of gold, gave it to Toby, and shook his head.

"We all have our weakness," said Toby; "with some it is women, with some wine, with some——"

"Wasps," said the King, laughing.

"My duty is over," Toby said, looking at the coins in his hand.

"Away with you," said Peter.

.

Then he remembered Galeran and Adela.

So far but one part of the plan had succeeded. Well, Fate is not often so good as that in match-making.

Peter went to the place where he had left them, and approached singing noisily.

When he came up they were a foot apart.

"I fear me I have left you over long," said Peter, "but affairs of State——"

"Blessed affairs," said Adela. Oh, if she had only known that it was the state of love whose great affairs he had been settling.

"Sire," Galeran said, "how can we thank you?"

"How can we thank you?" said Adela.

"Tell your parents, both of you," the King said, "that by a little careful arrangement I have fulfilled my promises."

THE TWENTIETH YEAR

THE STORM

IN a torment of mind the King walked up the slope of the hill above Saint Gabriel's, reached the summit, and threw himself down on the short grass.

It was late afternoon. Peter was bewildered and his hands shook with excitement.

To-morrow, before all his people, he was to be betrothed in the abbey to a girl he had never seen —the Lady of Emms.

All that he knew about her, all that he had allowed himself to hear was this: she was his age exactly, very beautiful, very good to her people; she owned all the lands to the east of the river Candida for many miles.

It was a diplomatic match.

He had flung himself out of the Council Chamber—

"If it must be, let it be so," he had said, and then in a rage he had dashed out of the room. The grave faces of his councillors haunted him now.

Here, at least, he was free to think alone.

On his right a clump of pine trees, sentinels to a company of trees which stood like a regiment on the side of the wind-swept spur. In front of him, a yard or so away, was the edge of the cliff, which sloped brokenly down to the sea. On his left, after a gorse-filled space, was the steep path by which he had climbed; it ran down, threading its way between lichen-covered rocks, to Saint Gabriel's, the fishing village.

To be a king, and to have his hands tied by his kingdom! He cursed his kingship. What did he want with marriage? He knew that his emotions beat hopelessly against a rock of necessity. The stern, grave faces of his councillors! They came back to him as he lay there, and he likened them to the crew of a ship driving her upon the rocks, himself a hopeless figurehead, the first part of the vessel to be crushed. As he thought, he knew that he was unfair.

He lay there, tearing out grass and dead heather, thinking of summer days that he had spent upon this cliff when the world was kinder and he was free; when the heather tinkled as green lizards ran through it; thought of the quiet heath, the gorse like witches' money, the grass like fairy lances.

Then he was free, a bird without a cage; now, like a captured bird, he must beat his wings against a golden cage with—a mate. His head fell forward and he bit the grass in an agony of temper.

Something in the big feeling of the place calmed him slowly, and he raised his head to look at the vast expanse of sky and sea—the sweep of fields and downs—the town perched on the hill.

He noticed a forbidding stillness in the air, a hushed, eager silence.

The sky was clear, except along the horizon, where a long dark cloud swept across the sky. He watched this dark cloud gradually increase and spread out over the heavens. A low growl of thunder came rumbling over the sea.

Then the pine trees shivered, and a puff of wind, like a little gasp, brushed past him and stirred the low bushes. Several heavy drops of rain splashed on his face.

The sky became overcast, the rumble of thunder came nearer.

He remembered that a rock overhung the tortuous pathway that led down to the sea; so he rose, gathered his heavy cloak about him, and drew the hood over his head.

The sky was now a dark slate colour, and the sea,

from the dancing blue of a moment or so before, seemed to have armed itself against the coming storm in a thick coat of dingy green.

He stood there, watching, and saw white wave-crests leap and toss and fall; saw, far away, a boat beating against the wind, trying to make the harbour of Saint Gabriel's before the fury of the storm should catch it.

As he waited, watching the storm gather strength, a weird peculiar light spread over everything, bringing out in vivid colours all the dark sombre green of the pine trees, the rich green of the short grass, the sullen colour of the sea, and the dirty white of the wave-crests.

In the tense silence a crisp footfall sounded.

Peter turned.

Standing by the clump of pine trees was a girl. She was clothed in a long grey garment which fell about her feet; the hood she wore was pushed back on to her shoulders and showed a great loose mass of rich brown-red hair. Her pale oval face, lit by the peculiar light, seemed almost unearthly. One hand was pressed against her bosom, the other held a bunch of violets.

She stood there, picked out so plainly against the dark trees that every detail of her simple dress

showed the shadows clean and clear. Her eyes were grey and opened wide.

A gust of wind came suddenly, and blew her hair out in two clouds on either side of her face.

Neither Peter nor the girl spoke.

Like a Spirit of the Storm she looked.

Then great drops of rain fell—now slow, now quick, now beating fast down. The light left the sky and a flash of lightning rent the heavens from end to end.

As the thunder crashed the girl ran forward and came to Peter's side.

Without a word he led the way down the difficult path a short distance, to where a rock had to be climbed before the sheltering space overhung by a great boulder might be reached.

She seemed to understand, and surrendered herself to him, gave him her hand and clambered, with his aid, on to the top of the rock.

Peter climbed down the other side and held his arms open.

The girl put her foot out on a ledge to step to him when she all but slipped, so slippery was the surface of the rock with rain.

He caught her before she fell, and lifting her,

carried her in his arms the pace or two it was to the safe sheltered space.

The whole of his being shook to hold this warm body in his arms. The scent of the violets, heightened by the rain, made his brain swim. His heart beat violently, his senses woke—his youth fell away from him, shattered in an instant, and he became a man; a man holding a woman in his arms.

Under the sheltering rock they sat to watch the storm, without a word, so complete was their newborn understanding.

Below them the sea roared unceasingly and threw great clouds of spray and foam right up to them. The wind shrieked and whistled past them, bearing bits of stick and gorse along in its wild galloping career; it seemed like some mad huntsman hunting with a pack of leaves which flew before him.

The lightning sometimes seemed to strike the ground they sat upon, and then the wild, crashing, rattling thunder drowned all other noise.

The angry hiss of rain beat on the rocks and bushes, the sea sent mammoth kisses to the shore, and they could hear the sharp intake of its breath as it sucked in the stones upon the beach.

It was as if the foundations of the world were shaken and upheaved.

Now they could see, by some bright flash of lightning, the boat at sea battling with the waves: it showed a little nearer home each time, and it seemed as if the sea were disappointed of a sacrifice and roared more hoarsely in its demand for victims.

Then, after a blinding flash, they heard the thunder sound more distantly, and knew the storm had passed its highest pitch.

The sky grew lighter and the wind began to drop.

Then they realized that all this while, during the progress of the storm, they had been sitting hand in hand.

The grumbling of the thunder died away; the wind dropped as quickly as it had arisen; the rain fell slowly, pattered awhile, and ceased.

Over the sea a faint crimson glow showed in the sky. The sun was setting.

In the silence following the storm the drip of water from the sheltering rock splashed noisily into a pool below; the pattering of the leaves, as they dropped their load of rain, was peaceful—calm.

The boat had reached the shelter of St. Gabriel's Cob.

Peter looked at the girl beside him.

"Who are you?" he asked in a voice strange to himself.

She drew her hand from his and brushed the wet hair from her face.

"A witch," she said, half smiling.

But he was deadly earnest, awakened to new thoughts, trembling with the exquisite emotion of a new feeling. With his eyes he devoured her.

"Spirit of the Storm," he said, "how did you come here? Born to me in that queer light before the storm, sitting beside me in the hour when Nature showed her strength, holding my hand so that we two were one for that brief hour. Now when my very soul seems bursting in its cage of flesh—now that I know I am flesh and blood—tell me, Who are you?"

The girl was pale and shaken by his passionate words, but held herself quietly.

"You must not ask," she said; "you must never know—and if you should discover by any chance, or meet me ever again, if Fate should will it so—forget me. Think that this time is some wild dream, and that I was but a Spirit of the Storm."

"Forget!" he answered her, "forget—when all my heart has built itself anew and calls for you. Oh, what is this that fills my heart and soul and body, melting them in one massed quivering desire! I love you."

"Love, such as this, is not for me," she replied. "Destiny, which but an hour or two ago I thought so kind, has willed it otherwise."

"Love knows no destiny," he said wildly. "Here, in this place, after this hour, all that has gone before is blotted from our lives. Sooner than let you go I would have this rock fall on us and crush us dead, in this supreme moment of my life."

She crushed the violets that lay now in her lap, but never spoke.

Then the King remembered what he must do the next day, and his feeling turned to acutest pain.

The girl was wiser than the man of twenty, who felt his new-born manhood overwhelm him, and she knew that she must not speak until his storm was over.

She knew that she could never love another man so well, for her heart was moved as was his, and she felt a burning love him for him. She knew that a duty lay clear before her, from which there was no escape.

That afternoon she had left her room over the gateway in the castle garden to wander in the pine woods. She was stopping with her foster-mother, whose husband was the captain of the gate, and to-

morrow she was to be betrothed to a man she had never set eyes on.

She was the Lady of Emms.

When her mother had given birth to a daughter twenty-one years ago, the Lord of Emms was disgusted and furious, and his lady was almost equally distressed. No care was taken of the girl, and at a tender age her father had caused her to be conveyed secretly to Borewood and there lost.

However, Fate ruled otherwise, and she was no sooner lost than found and brought back to Emms by a certain monk, one of the Godmen of the wood. When she was ten her father died, and a year after that her mother died also. Now she was the Lady of Emms—soon to become Queen of the Little Kingdom.

In the kingdom of love they were both beggars on horseback.

She broke the silence.

"At least we have an hour to ourselves."

"So you love me?" said Peter.

She looked at him so that he knew.

Peter stretched out his arms; but she shook her head.

"An hour!" he said. "We might have a life-

time if you would. I will give up everything, leave everything. Meet me by Peter Gate to-night at midnight, and I will tell you everything."

He dared not tell her now, thinking that if she knew, or even guessed, she would never come to him.

"I love you so," he said, "that my heart and body quake and tremble to be near you."

"A woman's love," the girl said, "is something different to that. It is a thing poured into our nature and there fermented—this is the wine—a child, a husband, and a home; for we are mothers first, deep down in our hearts, then wives, then tidy souls who love our hearth and home. We are strange creatures of perversity."

"Storm Spirit," said Peter.

"And Spirit of the After Peace."

"Here in my heart," said Peter, "is no after peace but a great storm raging, so that I feel hurt to death by my great longing."

Knowing herself bound, not knowing who he was, she felt a pang of jealousy that any other woman should come after her and give him the peace she needs must deny him.

In a low voice she said, "Will you keep your love for me?"

"Till the last breath sighs from my lips," he answered, "and sighing breathes your name."

"You do not know it," she replied.

"But you will tell it to me before we part," he said, "that I may bless you in my prayers, think of you day by day."

"I may not," she answered.

"Shall there be such a barrier between us," he cried, "that I may not even know your name?"

"A barrier between us which you must never break, which you must honour all your life."

He made a wild gesture with his hands.

On a sudden a dog barked on the cliff over their heads. They both started up.

"My God," he said in a whisper, "you must meet me to-night outside Peter Gate—all will be well. I shall not bring a servant nor anything but a pouch of gold and a stout staff. You will be there in a dark cloak. I will bring two horses and we will ride away—somewhere—anywhere."

In his strong hands he took her pale fingers as in a vice, and drew her to him.

All her strength gone when he touched her, she said—

"Let me go. I will be there."

A voice called the dog back overhead. Peter

recognized the tones of the Captain of the Gate.

"Good-bye," she said hurriedly.

"Till to-night," he said. Then drew her up to him.

"To-night," she said, pulling herself free—"to-night."

So she left him, climbed the rock unaided, and mounted the steep path.

He waited there, hearing the dog bark and whine joyfully, and heard them go away.

The sun had set, and now the sky was dim and dusky, waiting for the stars.

Peter knew that he must leave this hallowed spot, where his youth lay buried, so he gathered his cloak about him once again, and then knelt down to kiss the ground before he left the place.

Now in the town were the streets being cleaned, the hangings getting ready for the first of May; now was the maypole trimmed and stuck into its place; now was his castle dark and desolate to him, for love had come and killed his former joys.

He made his way down the rocky cliff-side to the shore, and stood there watching the waves tumbling in, saw the stars appear in order on the sky, and a pale new moon creep into her place.

Then, numbed soul and body, he made his way back to the castle.

As he walked, Peter revolved the night's work in his mind. At midnight he would leave his room softly, and go by the secret staircase into the first garden, through the first garden to a gateway which gave on to a main lane lying by the wall running to Peter Gate. Here he could easily pass the guard and so go out. Then he would see her —the thought quickened his steps—and, coming to her, would lead her to a field where two good horses were.

Could he carry two saddles? he thought. Yes; darkness would favour that, and he must risk it.

Then away to Father John, over in Borewood, and, after that, defiance of the world.

The King entered the town by Peter Gate, and looked about him carefully to note everything against that night.

He passed through the streets, which were thronged with people. Some one recognized him and the news spread. From the gate to the market-place he was cheered. People pressed against him to touch his cloak, children ran across his path. The men fitting the maypole securely in the market-place—late as it was—cheered loudly

as he went by. The sound struck like a knife into his heart. These were his people.

The thought throbbed in his brain, and he crossed the courtyard of the castle, where lackeys and squires ran forward in case he needed them. He was going to sacrifice his people, his kingdom, to his love. He knew what it meant—the councillors had told him. The King must marry a great lady of royal blood. The Lady of Emms was royal. The King must marry where great lands and a fine dowry went; she had all these. She was the ideal mate for a king of the Little Kingdom.

Again, if he did not marry her, what would the great knights of Emms do? His people had felt the sting of war not long ago, and cared better for peace.

Here was he about to run away at midnight with a girl whom none knew. How could he face his people after that?

Peter reached his room and threw off his wet clothes, warmed himself by the log fire, and then put on a new white set of garments—his clothes of ceremony for the next day; and as he put them on he put on a new mind, full of firm resolution.

Going below, he called his officers and gave orders for the night.

"Let every gate to-night have a double guard; every gate—the gates of the garden and the gates of the walls."

Thinking he feared some disturbance, the Captain of the Household was about to speak to the King to show that there was no necessity for such vigilance.

"Let no one—even if it chance to be myself—pass out or in by any gate to-night."

Surprised by this order, the officers withdrew, and Peter, having protected himself from danger without, left the hall below, went to his chamber upstairs, and, having forbidden any one the room, he wrestled with the distress in his heart.

THE TWENTY-FIRST YEAR

THE AGONY IN THE GARDEN

THE FIRST OF MAY

AN hour before midnight, Peter the King rose from his disordered bed and went to the window.

For hours he had lain, tossing feverishly, trying to strangle the love in his heart, trying to quench the burning agony of his heart with cold reason.

His face was white, his hair tumbled, his clothes torn where he had pulled at them.

The rich, white suit, made purposely for the ceremony to take place in a few hours' time, was creased and rent.

Now, when the cool night air touched his hot face, all his thoughts burned fresh and painfully in his breast.

He thought of the girl standing in the shadow of the gate, waiting for him, waiting for the man who never would come.

A key lay on the window-seat, and he felt it press

against his knee when he put it there to lean more easily on the window-sill. It was the key of the door to the secret staircase.

Into his head the thoughts flew quick and fast.

Hurriedly he stepped across the floor with light, noiseless footsteps, to the door of his room. It opened inwards, and luckily—he thought—without a sound. Lightly he stepped over the body of the squire who slept outside the door on a pile of cushions—sped down the corridor, and came to the little door behind the arras hanging.

There was a strange smile on his lips as he fitted the key silently to the door, opened it, closed it behind him, and descended the narrow winding staircase.

Narrow slits in the outer wall gave enough light to guide his footsteps, and he came at last on the lower door, which he unbarred.

In a moment he was outside, breathing the flower-scented air.

The calm and peace of the night made no impression on him, but he stepped quietly along a garden path, his heart beating wildly, his head burning, and his mind dwelling on the idea of that girl with the rich red-brown hair, waiting in the shadow by Peter Gate.

The path turned several times, and in the dark he trod once or twice into a bed of flowers by mistake. Finally he reached another door and opened it.

Then he found that he had taken a wrong turning in the dark.

The door through which he had gone opened into a garden on a slope, built up in terraces. The summit of this garden was the highest ground for miles around; on the level space at the top was a great crucifix in the middle of a bed of tall lilies.

Something made the King go slowly up the steep garden path until he reached the level place.

Peter stood there and looked round him.

Far below, the town, a mass of shadows, slept; near by rose the great watch-tower of the castle, standing like a tall, white ghost against the starry sky. Out beyond the walls his kingdom lay, spread like a map: the thin streak of starlit water showed where the river Candida wound her way to the sea.

All this was his to care for, govern, love—sacrifice himself for.

Here below him slept his people, trusting in him, giving him their love, looking up to him to do the right.

The Agony in the Garden

Here, then, was his Gethsemane; here he must cast off all thoughts of himself, and understand, as all who love must understand, the Garden of Gethsemane.

Peter looked up at the figure of Christ hung on the cross, and saw the features of the carven face lit by the stars show calm and still.

"O Christ!" he cried, "are all my friends asleep? are you so cold, so strange, deaf to my cry?

"Oh! to have held her in my arms just once again, and only once."

It was a bitter cry, and the peaceful night seemed to mock him. The stars blazed overhead, cold, friendless fires; the purple dome of heaven was cloudless; the world slept.

Peter knelt down by the bed of tall white lilies, which showed dreamy and most peaceful in the quiet light.

"God in heaven, where is your mercy, where is your compassion? Must I be tortured, so that my people here may bless me?

"Why was I given this body if not to feel with it a longing for another such—a woman's body that once and only once I held within my arms?

"Why was I given this heart if not to beat against that woman's heart? This shape, if not to

please her eyes? This mind, if not to think for her? And this estate, if not to make her rich?"

To his disordered mind it seemed that the figure on the cross mocked him by its silence.

"'Ask and it shall be given to you,' once You said; now when I ask so that my heart bleeds in the asking, where is Thy gift? Oh, I cannot, I cannot," he moaned.

Then it seemed to him that ghostly voices came into the night and whispered about him, so that he closed his ears.

Then phantoms of his brain moved past slowly before his eyes, and looked at him with cold, harsh looks.

"Le Haze," he called, "I loved you well. If you are in heaven speak to Him for me—and her. You are happier than I, give me, if you may, a little of your happiness."

Then he imagined that he saw knights who had given their lives for the Little Kingdom on the battlefield.

"I know what you would say," he cried. "Away, away, ghosts; this is not a question of death and battlefields, but of life without life—life with a gnawing, burning agony of love that may not be."

The Agony in the Garden

Peter called to the shadows, "Away, pitiless ghosts; you cannot comfort me."

The sweat stood on his forehead in great drops, his knees were numbed and cut by the sharp stones of the path; but he did not notice these things.

Presently the passion spent itself, and he bowed his head in a tired despair.

The world slept so peacefully that this boy seemed like the spirit of the world's spoilt desire, the world's broken lovers.

The only sound in the night was his throttled sobbing.

He knelt there for a little while, and then, finding himself calmer, he rose from his knees and looked about again.

"Sleep on, my little kingdom," said the King; "nor ever guess in waking hours the broken heart I laid upon the altar for your sake.

"I will be true to this good lady who is destined for me, and she shall never know a word of harshness or a sour look.

"Silent will I be to my heart's song, for you, my people, that I may never cause your hearts a moment's sadness. May this that I do, bring you all your heart's desire and prosperity, since it must

be, and I will play the king to you, and husband to my wife, in faith and loyalty.

"But to mine own heart I shall be ever true, and in the richest caskets of my mind shrine that pure love I sacrifice to-night on kingship's altar.

"To mine own heart ever true, and in my sleeping hours with your wife, Little Kingdom, by my side, I shall dream dreams of that sweet burden once I bore within my arms, nor hold myself for that faithless to my vows.

"My children shall be yours, for mine own heart's children never will be born; and, though I give my body to my people, my heart is hers alone, as my soul is God's.

"Trust me and I will not fail you, nor her you choose, for now I feel that I may trust myself.

"This has been my hour; the rest, until I lay my tired body down to die, are yours. Then, when I die, write me upon my tomb, where my body lies, 'A king, a soldier, and a husband,' for my body now is yours.

"Nameless to me she will ever remain, to you she has never been. O God! help me to do the right."

He knelt by the cross and tried to cool his fore-

head on the wood, and tried to pray, but no words came to him now.

It was past midnight, cold and bleak, but he did not feel it.

The Lady of Emms had spent a night as bad, but in another way. She felt as women feel in such a case, that she might bear a child to comfort her.

She lay upon her bed in the room over the gateway that led out of the high garden—so, without knowing it, was near her lover.

Tossing from side to side, she thought on that chance meeting on the cliff and wished it had not been, yet hugged the thought that it had ever been.

How she kissed the thought of him! How beautiful she saw him in her mind, recalling the sweet moment she had lain curled in his arms.

She also could not bear her room, and rose to get the air, dressed herself in a white flowing gown, and covered up her shoulders in a thick white cloak. So, for a while, she paced her room.

Her foster-mother, gentle soul, heard her ceaseless tramp upon the boards and came to soothe her, asking no question, saying a comforting, motherly word, smoothing her hair—then closed the window

lest she catch a cold; held the weeping girl in her soft arms and said, "My pet," and "Dearie."

Then the girl thought of the man waiting by the gate, and bit her fingers.

Out in the cold she saw him in her mind, standing with the two horses, waiting, peering into the darkness.

At last she ceased her weeping, and bade her foster-mother leave, saying she would sleep.

No sooner had the good woman left than the girl slipped softly down the stairs and by the door into the garden.

She felt that she must look for the last time as a free maid upon the windows of the castle where she must spend her days.

Softly she walked and mounted the steep terraced garden path up to the level place where the cross stood.

When she came near by the place she heard the sound of weeping, and wondered, catching suddenly at her breast in fear and trembling.

She reached the summit, on the far side of the cross where the King knelt, saw him, his face bent down, his forehead touching the wood of the cross.

Frightened, she slipped into a dark shadow and stood there.

The Agony in the Garden

"O Christ, the Comforter," the King was saying, in a loud strained voice, "lean down and hear me as I kneel. I love her so, I love her so; must this be? I thought myself so strong, but now, weakly, and like a child, I pray to Thee—I love her so. If it be Thy will, send me some sign from heaven to hallow it."

He raised his face to the Figure on the cross.

The girl, with a gasp at her throat, saw that it was her lover—knew that it was the King.

Slowly, not daring to startle him by too sudden a shock, she came out of the shadow. All the colour had left her face, her heart beat madly; she yearned to comfort him.

"Send me a sign, O God!" cried Peter.

Then she came slowly forward, moving behind the bed of tall white lilies.

He saw her, pale, tall, in the starlight—all dressed in pure white—the cloak over her head, her face in shadow.

He rose quickly to his feet, not knowing what to do.

It was the sign.

"Mary, Holy Mother of God," he said low, all his hope now broken.

Then she threw off her cloak, and it fell billowing upon the ground to her feet.

He saw her stand like a ghost there, and thought that she was the phantom of his love come to torture him.

"Who are you?" he said hoarsely.

"Not the Madonna," she said in a low voice, quivering.

Then he saw that she was real.

"A Judas—oh! a Judas, come to rob my kingdom by a kiss."

He swayed as he stood in the full flood of pent emotion.

"No Judas, I," she said, "but the Lady of Emms—Joan de Morne."

With a piercing cry he fell crashing in the bed of lilies at her feet.

With the noise, the guard at the gate turned quickly out, carrying lanterns on poles, and ran to the spot.

Here they found the King, his head resting on the knees of the Lady of Emms.



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